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Dwight Macdonald

MASSCULT AND MIDCULT: II*

As I noted in the first part of this article, the separation of Folk Art and High Culture in fairly watertight compartments corresponded to the sharp line once drawn between the common people and the aristocracy. The blurring of this line, however desirable politically, has had unfortunate results culturally. Folk Art had its own authentic quality, but Masscult is at best a vulgarized reflection of High Culture and at worst a cultural nightmare, a *Kulturkatzenjammer*. And while High Culture could formerly address itself only to the *cognoscenti,* now it must take the *ignoscenti* into account even when it turns its back on them. For Masscult is not merely a parallel formation to High Culture, as Folk Art was; it is a competitor. The problem is especially acute in this country because class lines are especially weak here. If there were a clearly defined cultural elite here, then the masses could have their *kitsch* and the classes could have their High Culture, with everybody happy. But a significant part of our population is chronically confronted with a choice between looking at TV or old masters, between reading Tolstoy or a detective story; i.e., the pattern of their cultural lives is "open" to the point of being porous. For a lucky few, this openness of choice is stimulating. But for most, it is confusing and leads at best to that middlebrow compromise called Midcult, to which this part of my essay is directed.

The turning point in our culture was the Civil War, whose

* Part I of this article appeared in the Spring, 1960 issue of PR.

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aftermath destroyed the New England tradition almost as completely as the October Revolution broke the continuity of Russian culture. (Certain disturbing similarities between present-day American and Soviet Russian culture and society may be partly due to these seismic breaks, much more drastic than anything in European history, including the French Revolution.) The New England culture was simply pushed aside by history, dwindling to provincial gentility, and there was no other to take its place; it was smothered by the growth of mass industry, by westward expansion, and above all by the massive immigration from non-English-speaking countries. The great metaphor of the period was the melting pot; the tragedy was that it melted so thoroughly. A pluralistic culture might have developed, enriched by the contributions of Poles, Italians, Serbs, Greeks, Jews, Finns, Croats, Germans, Swedes, Hungarians, and all the other peoples that came here from 1870 to 1910. It is with mixed feelings one reads Emma Lazarus's lines on the base of the Statue of Liberty:

> Give me your tired, your poor,
> Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
> The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
> Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed, to me:
> I lift my lamp beside the golden door.

For indeed these *were* the poor and tempest-tossed, the bottom-dogs of Europe, and for just this reason they were all too eager to give up their old-world languages and customs, which they regarded as marks of inferiority. Uprooted from their own traditions and cultures, offered the dirtiest jobs at the lowest pay, the masses from Europe were made to feel that their only hope of rising was to become "Americanized," which meant being assimilated at the lowest cultural (as well as economic) level. They were ready-made consumers of *kitsch*. A half century ago, when the issue was still in the balance, Randolph Bourne wrote:

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What we emphatically do not want is that these distinctive qualities should be washed out into a tasteless, colorless fluid of uniformity. Already we have far too much of this insipidity—masses of people who are cultural half-breeds, neither assimilated Anglo-Saxons nor nationals of another culture. . . . Our cities are filled with these half-breeds who retain their foreign names but have lost the foreign savor. This does not mean that . . . they have been really Americanized. It means that, letting slip from them whatever native culture they had, they have substituted for it only the most rudimentary American—the American culture of the cheap newspaper, the movies, the popular song, the ubiquitous automobile. . . .

Just so surely as we tend to disintegrate these nuclei of nationalistic culture do we tend to create hordes of men and women without a spiritual country, cultural outlaws without taste, without standards but those of the mob. We sentence them to live on the most rudimentary planes of American life.[1]

Bourne's fears were realized. The very nature of mass industry and of its offshoot, Masscult, made a pluralistic culture impossible. The melting pot produced merely "the tasteless, colorless fluid of uniformity." This much can be said for the dominant Anglo-Saxon Americans: they didn't ask the immigrants to accept anything they themselves were unwilling to accept. One recalls Matthew Josephson's vignette of Henry Clay Frick sitting on a Renaissance chair under a Rembrandt reading *The Saturday Evening Post*. They were preoccupied with building railroads, settling the West, expanding industry,

1. From "Trans-National America," reprinted in *The History of a Literary Radical* (S. A. Russell, 1956). Of course the immigrants were not all "huddled masses." Many, especially the Jews, were quite aware of the inferior quality of American cultural life. In *The Spirit of the Ghetto* (1902), Hutchins Hapgood quotes a Jewish immigrant: "In Russia, a few men, really cultivated and intellectual, give the tone and everybody follows them. But in America the public gives the tone and the literary man simply expresses the public. So that really intellectual Americans do not express as good ideas as less intellectual Russians. The Russians all imitate the best. The Americans imitate what the mass of the people want." A succinct definition of Masscult.

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perfecting monopolies and other practical affairs. Pioneers, O Pioneers! And the tired pioneer preferred Harold Bell Wright to Henry James.

X

We are now in a more sophisticated period. The West has been won, the immigrants melted down, the factories and railroads built to such effect that since 1929 the problem has been consumption rather than production. The work week has shrunk, real wages have risen, and never in history have so many people attained such a high standard of living as in this country since 1945. College enrollment this fall is over four million, three times what it was in 1929. Money, leisure, and knowledge, the prerequisites for culture, are more plentiful and more evenly distributed than ever before.

In these more advanced times, the danger to High Culture is not so much from Masscult as from a peculiar hybrid bred from the latter's unnatural intercourse with the former. A whole middle culture has come into existence and it threatens to absorb both its parents. This intermediate form—let us call it Midcult—has the essential qualities of Masscult—the formula, the built-in reaction, the lack of any standard except popularity—but it decently covers them with a cultural fig-leaf. In Masscult the trick is plain—to please the crowd by any means. But Midcult has it both ways: it pretends to respect the standards of High Culture while in fact it waters them down and vulgarizes them.[2]

The enemy outside the walls is easy to distinguish. It is its

2. It's not done, of course, as consciously as this suggests. The editors of *The Saturday Review* or *Harper's* or *The Atlantic* would be honestly indignant at this description of their activities, as would John Steinbeck, J. P. Marquand, Pearl Buck, Irwin Shaw, Herman Wouk, John Hersey and others of that remarkably large group of Midcult novelists we have developed. One of the nice things about Zane Grey was that it seems never to have occurred to him that his books had anything to do with literature.

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ambiguity that makes Midcult alarming. For it presents itself as part of High Culture. Not that coterie stuff, not those snobbish inbred so-called intellectuals who are only talking to themselves. Rather the great vital mainstream, wide and clear though perhaps not so deep. You, too, can wade in it for a mere $16.70 pay nothing now just fill in the coupon and receive a full year six hard-cover lavishly illustrated issues of *Horizon*: *A Magazine of the Arts,* "probably the most beautiful magazine in the world . . . seeks to serve as guide to the long cultural advance of modern man, to explore the many mansions of the philosopher, the painter, the historian, the architect, the sculptor, the satirist, the poet . . . to build bridges between the world of scholars and the world of intelligent readers. It's a good buy. Use the coupon *now.*" *Horizon,* now completing its second year, already has some 160,000 subscribers, which is more than the combined circulations, after many years of effort, of *Kenyon, Hudson, Sewanee, Partisan, Art News, The Arts, American Scholar, Dissent, Commentary,* and half a dozen of our other leading cultural-critical magazines.[3]

Midcult is not, as might appear at first, a raising of the level of Masscult. It is rather a corruption of High Culture which has the enormous advantage over Masscult that while also in fact "totally subjected to the spectator," in Malraux's phrase, it is able to pass itself off as the real thing. Midcult is the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, put out several years ago under the aegis of the Yale Divinity School, that destroys our greatest monument of English prose, the King James Version, in order to make the text "clear and meaningful to people today," which is like taking apart Westminster Abbey to make Disneyland out of the fragments. Midcult is

3. *Horizon* is not as bad as its blurb; the illustrations are indeed remarkable and the articles are usually competent; but they are mostly historical and the few contemporary themes are dealt with journalistically rather than critically. *Horizon* is a periodical encyclopedia, not really a magazine at all.

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the Museum of Modern Art's film department paying tribute to Samuel Goldwyn because his movies are alleged to be (slightly) better than those of other Hollywood producers—though why they are called "producers" when their function is to prevent the production of art (cf. the fate in Hollywood of Griffith, Chaplin, von Stroheim, Eisenstein and Orson Welles) this is a semantic puzzle. Midcult is the venerable and once venerated *Atlantic,* which in the last century printed Emerson, Lowell, Howells, James, and Mark Twain, putting on the cover of a recent issue a huge photograph of Dore Schary, who has lately transferred his high-minded sentimentality from Hollywood to Broadway and who is represented in the issue by a homily, "To A Young Actor," which synthesizes Jefferson, Polonius and Dr. Norman Vincent Peale, concluding: "Behave as citizens not only of your profession but of the full world in which you live. Be indignant with injustice, be gracious with success, be courageous with failure, be patient with opportunity, and be resolute with faith and honor." Midcult is the Book of the Month Club, which since 1926 has been supplying its members with reading matter of which the best that can be said is that it could be worse, i.e., they get John Hersey instead of Gene Stratton Porter. Midcult is the transition from Rodgers and Hart to Rodgers and Hammerstein, from the gay tough lyrics of *Pal Joey,* a spontaneous expression of a real place called Broadway, to the folk-fakery of *Oklahoma!* and the orotund sentimentalities of *South Pacific.*[4] Midcult is or was,

4. An interesting Midcult document is the editorial the *N.Y. Times* ran August 24th last, the day after the death of Oscar Hammerstein 2nd:

> . . . . The theatre has lost a man who stood for all that is decent in life. . . . The concern for racial respect in *South Pacific,* the sympathy and respect for a difficult though aspiring monarch in *The King and I,* the indomitable faith that runs through *Carousel* were not clever bits of showmanship. They represented Mr. Hammerstein's faith in human beings and their destiny. . . .
>
> Since he was at heart a serious man, his lyrics were rarely clever. Instead of turning facetious phrases he made a studious attempt to write idiomatically in the popular tradition of the musical the-

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"Omnibus," subsidized by a great foundation to raise the level of television, which began its labors by announcing it would "be aimed straight at the average American audience, neither highbrow nor lowbrow, the audience that made *Reader's Digest, Life, The Ladies Home Journal,* the audience which is the solid backbone of any business as it is of America itself" and which then proved its good faith by programs mingling Gertrude Stein and Jack Benny, Chekhov and football strategy, Beethoven and champion ice skaters. "Omnibus" failed. The level of television was not raised, for some reason.

XI

But perhaps the best way to define Midcult is to analyze certain typical products. The four I have chosen are Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea,* Thornton Wilder's *Our Town,* Archibald MacLeish's *J.B.* and Stephen Vincent Benet's *John Brown's Body.* They have all been Midcult successes: each has won the Pulitzer prize, has been praised by critics who should know better, and has been popular not so much with the masses as with the educated classes. Technically, they are advanced enough to impress the midbrows without worrying them. In content, they are "central" and "universal," in that line of hollowly portentous art which the French call *pompier* after the glittering, golden beplumed helmets of their firemen. Mr. Wilder, the cleverest of the four, has actually managed to be at once ultra-simple and grandiose. "Now there

> atre, for he was a dedicated craftsman. But the style that was apparently so artless has brought glimpses of glory into our lives. "There's a bright, golden haze on the meadow," sings Curly in *Oklahoma!* and the gritty streets of a slatternly city look fresher. "June is bustin' out all over," sing Carrie and Nettie in *Carousel* and the harshness of our winter vanishes. . . . To us it is gratifying that he had the character to use his genius with faith and scruple.

The contrast of faith (good) with cleverness (bad) is typical of Midcult, as is the acceptance of liberalistic moralizing as a satisfactory substitute for talent. Indeed, talent makes the midbrow uneasy: "Since he was a serious man, his lyrics were rarely clever."

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are some things we all know, but we don't take 'm out and look at 'm very often," says his stage manager, sucking ruminatively on his pipe. "We all know that *something* is eternal. And it ain't houses and it ain't names, and it ain't earth, and it ain't even the stars. . . . Everybody knows in their bones that *something* is eternal, and that something has to do with human beings. All the greatest people ever lived have been telling us for five thousand years and yet you'd be surprised how people are always losing hold of it. There's something way down deep that's eternal about every human being." The last sentence is an eleven-word summary, in form and content, of Midcult. I agree with everything Mr. Wilder says but I will fight to the death against his right to say it in this way.

The Old Man and the Sea was (appropriately) first published in *Life* in 1952. It won the Pulitzer Prize in 1953 and it helped Hemingway win the Nobel Prize in 1954 (the judges cited its "style-forming mastery of the art of modern narration"). It is written in that fake-biblical prose Pearl Buck used in *The Good Earth,* a style which seems to have a malign fascination for the midbrows—Miss Buck also got a Nobel Prize out of it. There are only two characters, who are not individualized because that would take away from the Universal Significance. In fact they are not even named, they are simply "the old man" and "the boy"—I think it was a slip to identify the fish as a marlin though, to be fair, it is usually referred to as "the great fish." The dialogue is at once quaint (democracy) and dignified (literature). "Sleep well, old man," quothes The Boy; or, alternatively, "Wake up, old man." It is also very poetic, as The Boy's speech: "I can remember the tail slapping and banging . . . and the noise of you clubbing him like chopping a tree down and the sweet blood smell all over me." (Even the Old Man is startled by this cadenza. "Can you really remember that?" he asks.) In the celebrated baseball dialogues we have a fusion of Literature & Democracy;

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"The great DiMaggio is himself again. I think of Dick Sisler and those great drives in the old park. . . . The Yankees cannot lose."

"But I fear the Indians of Cleveland."

"Have faith in the Yankees, my son. Think of the great DiMaggio."

And this by the man who practically invented realistic dialogue.

It is depressing to compare this story with *The Undefeated,* a bullfighting story Hemingway wrote in the 'twenties when, as he would say, he was knocking them out of the park. Both have the same theme: an old-timer, scorned as a has-been, gets one last chance; he loses (the fish is eaten by sharks, the bullfighter is gored) but his defeat is a moral victory, for he has shown that his will and courage are still intact. The contrast begins with the opening paragraphs:

Manuel Garcia climbed the stairs to Don Miguel Retana's office. He set down his suitcase and knocked on the door. There was no answer. Manuel, standing in the hallway, felt there was some one in the room. He felt it through the door.

He was an old man who fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf Stream and he had gone eighty-four days now without taking a fish. In the first forty days a boy had been with him. But after forty days without a fish the boy's parents had told him that the old man was now definitely and finally *salao,* which is the worst form of unlucky, and the boy had gone at their orders in another boat which caught three good fish the first week. It made the boy sad to see the old man come in each day with his skiff empty and he always went down to help him carry either the coiled lines or the gaff and the harpoon and the sail that was furled around the mast. The sail was patched with flour sacks and, furled, it looked like the flag of permanent defeat.

The contrast continues—disciplined, businesslike understatement v. the drone of the pastiche parable, wordy and sentimental

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("the flag of permanent defeat" fairly nudges us to sympathize). And all those "ands."

Undefeated is 57 pages long, as against *Old Man's* 140, but not only does much more happen in it but also one feels that more has happened than is expressed, so to speak, while *Old Man* gives the opposite impression. *Undefeated* has four people in it, each with a name and each defined through his words and actions; *Old Man* has no people, just two Eternal, Universal types. Indeed, for three-fourths it has only one, since The Boy doesn't go along on the fishing trip. Perhaps a Kafka could have made something out of it, but in Hemingway's realistic manner it is monotonous. "Then he began to pity the great fish"—that sort of thing. At times the author, rather desperate one imagines, has him talk to the fish and to the birds. He also talks to his hand: "How does it go, hand?" In *Undefeated,* the emotion arises naturally out of the dialogue and action, but in *Old Man,* since there's little of either, the author has to spell it out. Sometimes he reports the fisherman's improbable musings: "He is a great fish and I must convince him, he thought. . . . Thank God, they are not as intelligent as we who kill them, although they are more noble and more able." Sometimes the author tips us off: "He was too simple to wonder when he had attained humility. But he knew he had attained it." (A humble man who knows he has attained humility seems to me a contradiction in terms.) This constant editorializing—an elementary sin against which I used to warn my Creative Writing class at Northwestern University—contrasts oddly with the stripped, no-comment method that made the young Hemingway famous. "I am a strange old man," the hero tells The Boy. Prove it, old man, don't say it.

Our Town is an extraordinarily skillful bit of craftsmanship. I think it is practically actor-proof, which is why it is so often given by local dramatic societies. With that literary sensibility which has enabled him to fabricate each of his books in a different mode, a miracle of imitative versatility, Mr.

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Wilder has here made the final statement of the midbrows' nostalgia for small-town life, as Norman Rockwell has done it for the lowbrows in his *Post* covers. *Our Town*'s combination of quaintness, earthiness, humor, pathos and sublimity (all mild) is precisely Rockwell's, and the situations are curiously alike: puppy lovers at the soda fountain, wives gossipping over the back fence, decent little funerals under the pines, country editor, family doctor, high school baseball hero, all running in their well-worn grooves. What gives the play class, raising it into Midcult, are the imaginary props and sets and the interlocutory stage manager, devices Mr. Wilder got from the Chinese theater (he always gets them from somewhere). Brecht used similar devices to get his "alienation effect," to keep the audience from being hypnotized by the stage illusion—an original and hence shocking idea. But Mr. Wilder has nothing artistically subversive in mind; on the contrary, *Our Town* is as hypnotic, in the usual theatrical sense, as *East Lynne*. The stage manager is its heart, and he is such a nice, pipe-puffing, cracker-barrel philosopher—pungent yet broadminded—that only a highbrow can resist his spell (or, of course, a lowbrow). He comments on the local cemetery:

> This is certainly an important part of Grover's Corners. It's on a hilltop—a windy hilltop—lots of sky, lots of clouds—often lots of sun and moon and stars. . . . Yes, beautiful spot up here. Mountain laurel and li-lacks. . . . Over there are the old stones —1670, 1680. Strong-minded people that come a long way to be independent. Summer people walk around there laughing at the funny words on the tombstones. It don't do any harm. . . . Over there are some Civil War veterans. Iron flags on their graves. New Hampshire boys . . . had a notion that the Union ought to be kept together, though they'd never seen more than fifty miles of it. All they knew was the name, folks—the United States of America. And they went and died about it. . . . Yes, an awful lot of sorrow has sort of quieted down up here.

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Guess there just hasn't been anybody around for years as plumb mellow nor as straight-thinking either, as Mr. Wilder's stage-manager. Nope. 'Cept mebbe for Eddie Guest out Detroit way.

J.B. resembles *Our Town* in its staging—no sets, symbolic action accompanied by commentary—but in little else. Its language is high-falutin' where the other's is homespun, the comment is delivered by no village sage but by God and Satan in person, and its theme is nothing less than the relationship of man to God. It is Profound and Soul-Searching, it deals with the Agony of Modern Man, and it has been widely discussed, often by the author, in the Midcult magazines.[5] Mr. MacLeish mixes advanced staging with advanced poetry ("Death is a bone that stammers.") with family stuff ("J.B., forking wish-bone on Rebecca's plate: 'That's my girl!' ") with tough stuff ("Four kids in a car. They're dead. / Two were yours.") with melodrama ("No! Don't touch me!") with a Message of the grandest inconclusiveness. The question of God and man is chivvied about for two hours, no decision, and is then dropped in the last scene and a new toy is offered the audience, one they are familiar with from other Broadway plays, namely Love:

> Blow on the coal of the heart.
> The candles in the churches are out.

5. The Midcult mind aspires toward Universality above all. A perfect example was that "Family of Man" show of photographs Edward Steichen put on several years ago at the Museum of Modern Art to great applause. (The following summer it was the hit of the American exhibition in Moscow, showing that a touch of Midcult makes the whole world kin.) The title was typical—actually, it should have been called Photorama. There were many excellent photographs, but they were arranged under the most pretentious and idiotic titles—each section had a wall caption from Whitman, Emerson, Carl Sandburg or some other sage—and the whole effect was of a specially pompous issue of *Life*. ("*Life* on Life") The editorializing was insistent—the Midcult audience always wants to be Told—and the photographs were marshalled to demonstrate that although there are real Problems (death, for instance), it's a pretty good old world after all.

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The lights have gone out in the sky.
Blow on the coal of the heart
And we'll see by and by . . . .

Robert Brustein in *The New Republic* and Gore Vidal in *Partisan Review* have lately had some good things to say about the tendency of our playwrights to bring in love as a *deus ex machina* to magically resolve the problems raised by the preceding two hours of conspicuously loveless dramaturgy, so I merely note the fact here. The Boylston Professor of Rhetoric at Harvard made many mistakes in *J.B.,* but one was fatal—intermingling with his own versification some actual passages from the Book of Job. It is true that Elia Kazan, who directed the play with appropriate vulgarity, reduced the effects of these passages considerably by having them delivered over a loudspeaker in an orotund voice reminiscent of the fruitiest manner of Westbrook Van Voorhees on the March of Time. Even so, the contrast was painful between the somber and passionate elevation of the Book of Job and Mr. MacLeish's forcible-feeble style. It's really too much to go from:

Hast thou given the horse strength?
Hast thou clothed his neck with thunder!
He saith among the trumpets, Ha, Ha!

To:

Job won't take it! Job won't touch it!
Job will fling it in God's face
With half his guts to make it spatter!

The clever author of *Our Town* would never have made such a gaffe.

Finally, Mr. Benet's 377 page orgy of Americana, much admired in its day and still widely used in the schools as combining History and Literature. The opening Invocation strikes at once the right note, patriotic yet sophisticated:

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American muse, whose strong and diverse heart
So many men have tried to understand
But only made it smaller with their art . . .
And I have seen and heard you in the dry
Close-huddled furnace of the city street
Where the parched moon was planted in the sky
And the limp air hung dead against the heat.

Eliot echoes in the last four lines as Homer does in the section on Pickett's charge:

So they came on in strength, light-footed, stepping like deer,
So they died or were taken. So the iron entered their flesh.

Even Kipling's ballad manner:

Thirteen sisters beside the sea
Builded a house called Liberty
Builded a house called Liberty
And locked the doors with a stately key.
None should enter it but the free.
(Have a care, my son.)

Also Whitman:

She has seen so many faces and bodies, young and
then old, so much life, so many patterns of
death and birth.

Nor are humbler poetic models spurned:

She was the white heart of the birch . . .
Her sharp clear breasts
Were two young victories in the hollow darkness
And when she stretched her hands above her head
And let the spun fleece ripple to her loins,
Her body glowed like deep springs under the sun.

Mr. Benet is a master of the built-in reaction; it is impossible

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not to identify the emotion he wants to arouse. Sometimes solemn, sometimes gay, always straining to put it across, like a night-club violinist. Play, gypsy, play! One is never puzzled by the unexpected. The Wingates are Southern aristocrats and they are proud and generous and they live in a big white house with pillars. Abe Lincoln is gaunt, sad, kindly and "tough as a hickory rail." John Brown is strong, simple, fanatical—and "he knew how to die." Robert E. Lee does present a problem since no national cliché has been evolved for him. Mr. Benet begins cautiously: "He was a man, and as a man he knew / Love, separation, sorrow, joy and death." Safe enough. But he still hasn't found his footing by the end: "He wanted something. That must be enough. / Now he rides Traveller back into the west." A puzzling figure.

The final judgment on the United States is ambiguous: "the monster and the sleeping queen." For Mr. Benet on the one hand doesn't want to sell America short but on the other he doesn't want to make a fool of himself—the Midcult writer is always worried about those superior, sneering intellectuals, however he pretends to despise them. The ambivalence becomes a little frantic in the closing lines: "So when the crowd gives tongue / And prophets old and young / Bawl out their strange despair / Or fall in worship there, / Let them applaud the image or condemn, / But keep your distance and your soul from them. . . . / If you at last must have a word to say, / Say neither, in their way, / 'It is a deadly magic and accursed' / Nor 'It is blest' but only 'It is here.' " The American fear of ideas (bawling prophets) and in fact of consciousness (If you *must* have a word to say) has seldom been more naively expressed. Or the American device for evading these terrors: Let's stick to the *facts;* or, Say only 'It is here.' For ideas might lead to conclusions.

XII

The Enemy is clear. J.B's three comforters are men of

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ideas—Freudian, Marxist, theological—and each is presented as a repulsive bigot. In the 'thirties, Mr. MacLeish would have given the Marxist better lines, but that was in another age and besides the wench is dead. Mr. Wilder does it more suavely:

Belligerent man at back of auditorium: Is there no one in town aware of social injustice and industrial inequality?

Mr. Webb (editor of the Grover's Corners Sentinel): Oh yes, everybody is—somethin' terrible. Seems like they spend most of their time talking about who's rich and who's poor.

Belligerent man: Then why don't they do something about it?

Mr. Webb: Well, I dunno. I guess we're all hunting like everybody else for a way the diligent and sensible can rise to the top and the lazy and quarrelsome can sink to the bottom. But it ain't easy to find. . . . Are there any other questions?

Lady in a box: Oh, Mr. Webb? Mr. Webb, is there any culture or love of beauty in Grover's Corners?

Mr. Webb: Well, ma'am, there ain't much—not in the sense you mean. . . . But maybe this is the place to tell you that we've got a lot of pleasures of a kind here: we like the sun comin' up over the mountain in the morning, and we all notice a good deal about the birds. [etc.] But those other things, you're right ma'am, there ain't much. *Robinson Crusoe* and the Bible; and Handel's *Largo,* we all know that; and Whistler's *Mother*—those are just about as far as we go.

And this is just about as far as the play goes. Those who question the values of Grover's Corners, New Hampshire, 1901, are presented as grotesques while Editor Webb is presented as the norm. This might be justified as historical realism—although small-town editors fifty years ago were often crusaders and idealists—but of course Mr. Wilder is not interested in the actual 1901 Grover's Corners. "*Our Town* is not offered as a picture of life in a New Hampshire Village," he wrote in the preface to the 1957 edition, "or as a speculation about the conditions of life after death (that element I merely took from

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Dante's *Purgatory*). [The "merely" is a master-touch.—D. M.] It is an attempt to find a value above all price for the smallest events in our daily life." This is a half truth, which means it is mostly false. Not that Mr. Wilder is in any way insincere. Had he been, he could no more have written a Midcult masterpiece like *Our Town* than Norman Rockwell could have painted all those *Post* covers. But if one compares with *Our Town* a similar attempt to find a value "for the smallest events in our everyday lives," namely Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio,* one sees the difference between a work of art and a sincere bit of *kitsch*. What Mr. Wilder is really doing is nothing either so personal or so universal as he thinks it is. He is constructing a social myth, a picture of a golden age that is a paradigm for today. He has the best of both tenses—the past is veiled by the nostalgic feelings of the present, while the present is softened by being conveyed in terms of a safely remote past. But what a myth and what a golden age! Here one does get a little impatient with the talented Mr. Wilder.

The stage manager is its demiurge. He is the perfect American pragmatist, folksy and relaxed because that's jest the way things are and if anybuddy hankers to change 'em that's their right only (pause, business of drawing reflectively on pipe) chances are 't won't make a sight of difference (pipe business again) things don't change much in Grover's Corners. There is no issue too trivial for him not to take a stand on. "That's the end of the first act, friends," he tells the audience. "You can go smoke now"—adding with a touch of genius, "those that smoke." Don't do any harm, really, one way or t'other.

XIII

The special threat of Midcult is that it exploits the discoveries of the avant-garde. This is something new. Midcult's historical predecessor, Academicism, resembled it in being *kitsch* for the elite, outwardly High Culture but really as much

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a manufactured article as the cheaper cultural goods produced for the masses. The difference is that Academicism was intransigently opposed to the avant-garde. It included painters like Bougereau, Alma Tadema, and Rosa Bonheur; critics like Edmund Gosse and Edmund Clarence Stedman; composers like Sir Edward Elgar; poets like Alfred Austin and Stephen Phillips; novelists like Alphonse Daudet, John Galsworthy, Arnold Bennett, and Joseph Hergesheimer.[6] Academicism in its own dreary way was at least resisting Masscult. It had standards, the old ones, and it educated the *nouveaux riches,* some of whom became so well educated that they graduated to an appreciation of the avant-garde, realizing that it was carrying on the spirit of the tradition which the Academics were killing. It is possible to see Academicism as the growing pains of High Culture, the restrictive chrysalis from which something new might emerge. That it was always destroyed after a few decades carries out the simile—who looks at Tadema today, who reads Hergesheimer?

Midcult is a more dangerous opponent of High Culture because it incorporates so much of the avant-garde. The four works noticed above were more advanced and sophisticated, for their time, than were the novels of John Galsworthy. They are so to speak the products of lapsed avant-gardists who know

6. A typical Academic victory over the avant-garde was that by the "Beaux Arts" school of architecture, led by McKim, Mead & White, over the Chicago school, led by Louis Sullivan and including Frank Lloyd Wright, at the turn of the century. A stroll down Park Avenue illustrates the three styles. Academic: The Italian loggia of the Racquet & Tennis Club, the Corinthian extravagances of Warren Wheeler's Grand Central Building. Avant-garde: the Seagram Building, by Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson, and the Lever Building, by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. Midcult: the glass boxes imitating as cheaply as possible the Lever and Seagram buildings that are going up as fast as the old Academic-Renaissance apartment houses can be pulled down. One can hardly regret the destruction of the latter on either aesthetic or antiquarian grounds, but they did have a mild kind of "character" which their Midcult successors lack.

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how to use the modern idiom in the service of the banal. Their authors were all expatriates in the 'twenties—even Mr. Benet, who dates his Americanesque epic "Neuilly-sur-Seine, 1928." That they are not conscious of any shifting of gears, that they still think of themselves as avant-gardists is just what makes their later works so attractive in a Midcult sense. "Toward the end of the 'twenties I began to lose pleasure in going to the theater," Mr. Wilder begins the preface to the 1957 edition of *Three Plays*. He explains that, while Joyce, Proust and Mann still compelled his belief, the theater didn't, and he continues: "I began to feel that the theater was not only inadequate, it was evasive; it did not wish to draw on its deeper potentialities. . . . It aimed to be *soothing*. The tragic had no heat; the comic had no bite; the social criticism failed to indict us with responsibility. I began to search for the point where the theater had run off the track, where it had . . . become a minor art and an inconsequential diversion." That point, he found, was "the box-set stage," with its realistic sets and props and its proscenium dividing the actors from the audience. He fixed that, all right, but the plays he mounted on his advanced stage were evasive, soothing, without tragic heat or comic bite and spectacularly without social criticism. *The Skin of Our Teeth,* for instance, is as vast in theme as *Our Town* is modest, dealing with the whole history of the human race, but its spirit and its dialogue are equally folksy, and its point, hammered home by the maid, Sabina, is identical: life goes on and, to lapse into the idiom of Sabina's opposite number in *Our Town,* there ain't a thing you can do about it. "This is where you came in," she says at the final curtain. "We have to go on for ages and ages yet. You go home. The end of this play isn't written yet. Mr. and Mrs. Antrobus! Their heads are full of plans and they're as confident as the first day they began." A soft impeachment—but Midcult specializes in soft impeachments. Its cakes are forever eaten, forever intact.

The Skin of Our Teeth was first produced in 1942, at

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the low point of the war; its message—the adaptability and tenacity of the human race through the most catastrophic events —was a welcome one and was well received. "I think it mostly comes alive under conditions of crisis," writes the author. "It has often been charged with being a bookish fantasia about history, full of rather bloodless schoolmasterish jokes. But to have seen it in Germany soon after the war, in the shattered churches and beerhalls that were serving as theaters, with audiences whose price of admission meant the loss of a meal . . . it was an experience that was not so cool. I am very proud that this year [1957] it has received a first and overwhelming reception in Warsaw. The play is deeply indebted to James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*." Personally, its bookish quality is one of the things I like about the play, and its jokes are often good; in fact, as entertainment *The Skin of Our Teeth* is excellent, full of charm and ingenuity; its only defect is that whenever it tries to be serious, which is quite often, it is pretentious and embarrassing. I quite believe the author's statement about its reception in postwar Germany—he enjoys a much greater reputation abroad than here—and I agree that the audiences responded to it because it seemed to speak to them of the historical cataclysm they had just been through. I find this fact, while not unexpected, depressing. The bow to *Finnegans Wake* is a graceful retrieve of a foul ball batted up in the *Saturday Review* fifteen years earlier by Messrs. Campbell and Robinson, the authors of *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake*. They hinted at plagiarism, but I think one should rather admire the author's ability to transmute into Midcult such an impenetrably avant-garde work. There seems to be no limit to this kind of alchemy in reverse, given a certain amount of talent and brass.

XIV

Since 1900 American culture has moved, culturally, in a direction that on the whole appears to be up. Ella Wheeler

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Willcox yields to Stephen Vincent Benet. Maxfield Parrish's *Day Dreams* is replaced on the living-room wall by Van Gogh's *Sunflowers,* or even a Picasso print. Billy Sunday's Bible-shouting acrobatics are toned down to Billy Graham's more civilized approach, though with what gain to religious feeling has yet to be seen. In literary criticism, the artless enthusiasm of a William Lyon Phelps has modulated into the more restrained yea-saying of a Clifton Fadiman or a Granville Hicks. The late Arthur Brisbane used to speculate in short, punchy paragraphs separated by asterisks (they have been compared to the pauses a barroom philosopher makes to spit reflectively into the sawdust) on such topics as whether a gorilla could beat up a heavyweight champion in fair fight; but he would hardly go over as a columnist today, not even in that Hearst press whose circulation he swelled fifty years ago. He has been superseded by types like Dr. Max Lerner of the *N.Y. Post,* who can bring Freudian theory to bear on the sex life of Elizabeth Taylor and Eddie Fisher. Dr. Lerner was once managing editor of the Encyclopedia of Social Sciences; more recently he compiled a Midcult classic titled *America as a Civilization* in which he amassed 1,036 pages of data and interpretations without offending any religious, racial, political or social group. It is a solemn thought what he would do with Brisbane's man v. gorilla problem; as I recall, Brisbane finally concluded the gorilla would win; Dr. Lerner would probably take a more rounded viewpoint; his humanistic frame of reference would incline him to favor the heavyweight, but he would be careful to explain that no intrinsic inferiority was involved; just a matter of social environment. Gorillas are people too.

A tepid ooze of Midcult is spreading everywhere. Psychoanalysis is expounded sympathetically and superficially in popular magazines. Institutions like the Museum of Modern Art and the American Civil Liberties Union, once avant-garde and tiny, are now flourishing and respectable; but something

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seems to have been mislaid in the process, perhaps their *raison d'être*. Hollywood movies aren't as terrible as they once were, but they aren't as good either; the general level of taste and craftsmanship has risen but there are no more great exceptions like Griffith, von Stroheim, Chaplin, Keaton; Orson Welles was the last, and *Citizen Kane* is twenty years old. An enterprising journalist, Vance Packard, has manufactured two best-sellers by summarizing the more sensational findings of the academic sociologists, garnishing the results with solemn moralizings, and serving it up under catchy titles: *The Hidden Persuaders, The Status Seekers. Bauhaus* modernism has seeped down, in a vulgarized form, into the design of our vacuum cleaners, pop-up toasters, supermarkets and cafeterias.

The question, of course, is whether all this is merely growing pains—or, in more formal language, an expression of social mobility. Don't rising social classes always go through a *nouveau riche* phase in which they imitate the forms of culture without understanding its essence? And won't these classes in time be assimilated into High Culture? It is true that this has usually happened in the past. But I think there is a difference now. Before the last century, the standards were generally agreed on and the rising new classes tried to conform to them. By now, however, because of the disintegrative effects of Masscult I described in the first part of this essay, the standards are by no means generally accepted. The danger is that the values of Midcult, instead of being transitional—"the price of progress"—may now themselves become a debased, permanent standard.

I see no reason Midcult may not be stabilized as the norm of our culture. Why struggle with real poetry when the Boylston Professor of Rhetoric can given you its effects in capsule form—works twice as fast and has a "Blow on the coal of the heart" ending? Why read the sociologists when Mr. Packard gives you their gist painlessly?

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XV

This whole line of argument may be objected to as undemocratic. But such an objection is beside the point. As T. S. Eliot writes in *Notes Toward a Definition of Culture*:

> Here are what I believe to be essential conditions for the growth and for the survival of culture. If they conflict with any passionate faith of the reader—if, for instance, he finds it shocking that culture and equalitarianism should conflict, if it seems monstrous to him that anyone should have "advantages of birth"—I do not ask him to change his faith. I merely ask him to stop paying lip-service to culture. If the reader says: " The state of affairs which I wish to bring about is *right* (or is *just,* or is *inevitable*) ; and if this must lead to further deterioration of culture, we must accept that deterioration"—then I can have no quarrel with him. I might even, in some circumstances, feel obliged to support him. The effect of such a wave of honesty would be that the word *culture* would cease to be absurd.

That the word now is absurd—priggish, unctuous, worn slick with abuse—shows how mass-ified we have become. The great cultures of the past have all been elite affairs, centering in small upper-class communities which had certain standards in common and which both encouraged creativity by (informed) enthusiasm and disciplined it by (informed) criticism.

The old avant-garde of 1870-1930, from Rimbaud to Picasso, demonstrated this with special clarity because it was based not on wealth or birth but on common tastes. "Common" didn't mean uniform—there were the liveliest, most painful clashes—but rather a shared respect for certain standards and an agreement that living art often runs counter to generally accepted ideas. The attitude of the old avant-garde, in short, was a peculiar mixture of conservatism and revolutionism that had nothing in common with the tepid agreeableness of Masscult. It was an elite community, a rather snobbish one, but anyone could join who cared enough about such odd things.

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Its significance was that it simply refused to compete in the established cultural marketplaces. It made a desperate effort to fence off some area within which the serious artist could still function, to erect again the barriers between the *cognoscenti* and the *ignoscenti* that had been breached by the rise of Masscult. The attempt was absurd, according to some modern ideas, since it was against the whole movement of history; and our cultural sociologists, had they been anachronistically consulted by Yeats or Stravinsky, could have proved to them with irrefutable tables and research studies that it could not possibly come to anything. For it was, sociologically speaking, unrealistic. Nevertheless, the attempt did in fact succeed, perhaps because artists, writers and musicians are not very good at statistics, and to it we owe most of the major creations of the last seventy years.

The old avant-garde has passed and left no successors. We continue to live off its capital but the community has broken up and the standards are no longer respected. The crisis in America is especially severe. Our creators are too isolated or too integrated. Most of them merge gracefully into Midcult, feeling they must be part of "the life of our time," whatever that means (I should think it would be ambitious enough to try to be part of one's own life), and fearful of being accused of snobbishness, cliqueism, negativism or, worst of all, practising "art for art's sake" (though for what better sake?). Some revolt, but their work tends toward eccentricity since it lacks contact with the past and doesn't get support from a broad enough intelligentsia in the present. The two currently most prominent groups, the "action painters" and the beatnik academy of letters, differ from the old avant-garde in two interesting ways. They are cut off from tradition: the works of Joyce and Picasso, for instance, show an extraordinary knowledge of (and feeling for) the achievements of the past, while those of Jack Kerouac and Clifford Still, for instance, do not. And they have had too much publicity too soon; the

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more they try to shock the Midcult audience, the more they are written up in the Lucepapers; they are "different," that potent advertising word whose charm reveals how monotonous the landscape of Midcult has become.

The beatnik's pad is the modern equivalent of the poet's garret in every way except the creation of poetry. Our well-oiled machinery of cultural exploitation provides those who are Different with lecture dates, interviews, fellowships, write-ups, and fans of both sexes (the word's derivation from "fanatics" is clearer in these circles than among the more restrained enthusiasts of baseball, possibly because the latter have a technical knowledge rarely found among the former). The machinery tempts them to extremes since the more fantastic their efforts, the more delighted are their Midcult admirers. *"Pour épater les bourgeois"* was the defiant slogan of the nineteenth-century avant-gardists but now the bourgeoisie have developed a passion for being shocked. "If possible," Kerouac advises young authors, "write without 'consciousness' in a semi-trance," while a prominent advanced composer has written a Sonata for Six Radios that is performed by turning each to a different station, a sculptor has exhibited a dozen large beach pebbles dumped loosely on a board, a painter has displayed an all-black canvas only to be topped by another who showed simply—a canvas. At last, one hears the respectful murmurs, The Real Thing! The avant-garde of the heroic period (except for Gertrude Stein) drew the line between experiment and absurdity. Efforts like the above were limited to the Dadaists, who used them wittily and imaginatively to satirize the respectable Academic culture of their day. But the spoofs of Dada have now become the serious offerings of what one might call the lumpen-avant-garde.

XVI

At this point, a question may be asked, and in fact should be asked, about the remarkable cultural change that has taken

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place since 1945. Statistically, a very good case can be made out that in the last fifteen years there has been a more widely diffused interest in High Culture than ever before in our history. The cause is the same as that for the development of Midcult, namely, the accelerating increase in wealth, leisure and college education. All three have been growing at an extraordinary rate since 1945, especially the last. Although the population between eighteen and twenty-one has increased only two per cent in the last ten years, college enrollment has almost doubled. There are now as many postgraduate students as there were undergraduates when I went to college in the late 'twenties. This enormous college population—one must add in several hundred thousand teachers—is the most important fact about our cultural situation today. It is far bigger, absolutely and relatively, than that of any other country. Some of its potentialities are being realized, but the most important—the creation and support of a living culture on a high level—is as yet hardly embryonic and perhaps never will come to birth. For this would mean drawing that line between Masscult and High Culture which the rise of Midcult has blurred. And there is something damnably American about Midcult.

Let us begin with the positive statistics. Since 1945 we have seen the following. The rise of the "quality" paperback, retailing at 95¢ up and presenting, at a third or less the cost of the original hard-cover edition, everything from Greek myths to the best contemporary scholars, critics, and creative writers. The sales of classical records, now about a fourth of total record sales and actually equal in dollar volume to Rock 'n Roll. The proliferation throughout the country of symphony orchestras (there are now 1100, double the 1949 number, and every city of 50,000 has one), local art museums (2,500 as against 600 in 1930), and opera-producing groups (there are now 500, a seven-fold increase since 1940). The extraordinary success of Noah Greenberg's Pro Musica Antiqua group, which specializes in medieval and early renaissance music, is a case in point.

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The increase in "art" movie theaters, from 12 in 1945 to over 550 today. The existence today of some 5,000 community theaters and the development, in the last ten years, of a vigorous off-broadway theater. Finally, the beginnings, in the last year, of what might be called an Off-Hollywood cinema—low-budget serious films made and financed outside the industry, such as *Pull My Daisy, Jazz on a Summer's Day, The Savage Eye, Weddings and Babies,* and the forthcoming film version of *The Connection.*

This is all very well and indeed extremely well. For this is not Midcult but for the most part the unadulterated article.[7] The books are the complete texts, the music is uncut and well-performed, the art works the best going, the movies usually interesting (though there is an admixture of Brigitte Bardot, you gotta live), the off-Broadway plays usually serious and the community theater ones often so.

Nor is this all that can be said. It is probably no easier today to make a living in the marketplace by serious writing or painting or composing than it ever was, but since 1945 there have come into existence a whole new category of what the trade unionist calls "fringe benefits." Institutional support of the poet, writer, artist, composer now goes far beyond teaching jobs to (1) foundation grants, (2) prizes and awards by all kinds of arts-and-letters groups, (3) lecture fees (one wonders how some people ever get any work done at all), (4) luxury junkets to East-West, North-South, Up-Down cultural gatherings all over the world, (5) Fulbright and other fellowships, (6) fees for advising literary aspirants at what are misnamed

7. Although the two are often confused, it is one thing to bring High Culture to a wider audience without change; and another to "popularize" it by sales talk in the manner of Clifton Fadiman or Mortimer J. Adler, or by pastiches like *J.B.* and *John Brown's Body,* or by hoking it up as in Stokowski's lifelong struggle to assimilate Bach to Tchaikowsky or those Stratford, Conn., productions of Shakespeare, which surpass those of London's Old Vic in showmanship as much as they fall short of them in style and intelligence.

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"writers' conferences." As Wallace Markfield put it in the *New Leader* of March 18, 1957: "No other generation . . . has pursued the Good Job quite so wisely and so well. This is not to say that they have consigned themselves to the gas chambers of Madison Avenue or Luceland. Far from it: their desks are more likely to be littered with *Kenyon Review* than with *Printer's Ink*. To their lot fall the foundation plums, the berths with the better magazines and book-houses, the research sinecures. They are almost never unemployed; they are only between grants." Similarly, Greenwich Village bohemians now make a comfortable living selling leather sandals and silver jewelry to the tourists just like the Indians in New Mexico. Nowadays everybody lives on the reservation.

So much for the positive side of our current boom in culture. The chief negative aspect is that so far our Renaissance, unlike the original one, has been passive, a matter of consuming rather than creating, a catching up on our reading on a continental scale. The quality paperbacks sell mostly the Big Names already established in hard covers. The records and the 1100 orchestras play Mozart and Stravinsky rather than Elliott Carter. The art museums show mostly old masters or new masters like Matisse, with a Jackson Pollock if they are very daring. The new theaters present almost entirely old plays: off-Broadway has done well by Chekhov, Shaw, Ibsen, O'Neill, Brecht, Beckett, and Shakespeare, but except for *The Connection* and *The Zoo Story,* it has had almost nothing of significance by hitherto unknown playwrights. We have, in short, become skilled at consuming High Culture when it has been stamped PRIME QUALITY by the proper authorities, but we lack the kind of sophisticated audience that supported the achievements of the classic avant-garde, an audience that can appreciate and discriminate on its own.

For this more difficult enterprise, we shall need what we very well may not get for all our four million college population: a cultural community. The term is pompous but I can

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think of no more accurate one. It is strange how many brain-workers we have and how few intellectuals, how many specialists whose knowledge and interest are confined to their own "field" and how few generalists whose interests are broad and non-professional. A century ago Lord Melbourne, himself a strikingly non-specialized and indeed rather ignorant intellectual, observed: "A man may be master of the ancient and modern languages and yet his manners shall not be in the least degree softened or harmonized. The elegance, grace and feeling which he is continually contemplating cannot mix with his thoughts or insinuate themselves into their expression—he remains as coarse, as rude and awkward, and often more so, than the illiterate and the ill-instructed." One of Melbourne's favorite quotations was Jacques's remark, in *As You Like It,* when the rustic clown quotes Ovid: "O knowledge ill-inhabited —worse than Jove in a thatched house!" One might also cite Ortega y Gasset's observation, apropos of "the barbarization of specialization": "Today, when there are more scientists than ever, there are fewer cultured men than, for example, in 1750." A comparison of Diderot's *Encyclopedia* with the post-1920 American editions of the *Britannica* would be interesting—although, of course, Gasset's contention can never be proved (or disproved) if only because "a cultured man" is not a scientific category. Like all the important categories.

XVII

In England, cultural lines are still drawn with some clarity. The B.B.C., for instance, offers three distinct programs: the Light (Masscult), the Home (Midcult) and the tactfully named Third (High Culture). It is true that the daily papers are divided about like ours: three good ones (*Times, Guardian, Telegraph*) with relatively small circulations and many bad ones with big circulations. The popular papers are not only much bigger than ours—the *Mirror* and the *Express* have about five million each, twice the circulation of the N.Y. *Daily News,*

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our biggest—but also much worse. One must go to London to see how trivial and mindless the popular press can become. But if the masses have their dailies, the classes have a type of periodical for which there is no American analogue, and I think the vulgarity of the mass press and the high quality of the class press are both the result of the sharper definition of cultural lines there.

This is a magazine-reading country. When one comes back from abroad, the two displays of American abundance that dazzle one are the supermarkets and the newsstands. There are no British equivalents of our Midcult magazines like *Atlantic* and *The Saturday Review*, or of our mass magazines like *Life* and *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Look*, or of our betwixt-&-between magazines like *Esquire* and *The New Yorker* (which also encroach on the "little magazine" area). There are one or two women's magazines, I suppose because the women's magazine is such an ancient and essential form of journalism that even the English dig it.

The one kind of magazine we haven't had over here since the liberal weeklies stubbed their toes on the Moscow Trials is the serious, widely read weekly. The English have at least seven: *The Spectator, The New Statesman, The Economist, The Times Literary Supplement, The Listener, The Observer* and *The Sunday Times*. The first four have circulations between 40,000 and 90,000. *The Listener* has, I believe, over 200,000; it is published by the B.B.C. and is made up almost wholly of broadcast material—how long would it take to accumulate a similar issue from our own radio and television? Months? Years? *The Observer* and *The Sunday Times* (no connection with the daily *Times*, which doesn't come out on Sunday) are really Sunday magazines in a newspaper format; their special articles and their extensive review sections are on the level of the other weeklies; and they have circulations of over half a million. (They are post-war phenomena, analogous to our own boom in quality paperbacks and classical records.)

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These British weeklies have large enough circulations to be self-supporting and to pay their contributors a living wage. Their nearest parallels here, in quality, are our "little" magazines, which come out either quarterly or bi-monthly, have small circulations (5,000 is par, 15,000 prodigious), run at a chronic deficit and pay contributors and editors meagerly.

What must be done here marginally, with help from "angels" either personal or institutional, can be done there as a normal part of journalism. Although a much smaller percentage of the English population goes to college, they have a larger and more cohesive cultural community than we do. The sale of a serious non-fiction book by a writer who is not a Name, for instance, is often larger there than here despite our three or four times larger population. Here a book tends to be either a best-seller or nothing, as a writer is either a Success or a Failure; there is no middle ground because there is no intellectual class. This may also be the reason more titles are published there; in 1958 it was 16,700 there, 11,000 here; it is the difference between handicraft and mass production, between a number of articulated publics and one great amorphous mass market.

England still has something of a functioning class system, culturally speaking. The angry young men are angry about it. I can't think why. An American living in London is delighted by the wide interest in art and letters, the liveliness of the intellectual atmosphere, the sense he gets constantly from the press and from conversations of a general interest in what he is interested in. It is, of course, general only to perhaps five per cent of the population, but in America it isn't even this much general; it is something shared only with friends and professional acquaintances. But in London one meets stockbrokers who go to concerts, politicians who have read Proust.[8]

8. Actually, I *can* think why the young men are angry. The Enemy looks very different from there than from here. From there, it is too little democracy; from here, too much. They see cultural lines as relics of

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The English amateur scholar—"just a hobby, really"—is a species little known over here. Most educated Englishmen seem to take an interest in cultural matters as a matter of course, and many of them have a personal, non-professional knowledge of one or two fields—a disinterested interest, so to speak —which is quite impressive. Our college graduates are not apt to "keep up" with such things unless they teach them. Their hobbies are less likely to be Jacobean madrigals than home workshops equipped with the latest in power tools and their equivalent of the British weekly is likely to be *Time* or *Newsweek*. In only one field do we match their amateur scholarship. The sports pages are our equivalent of the *Times Literary Supplement*; in each case, experts write for a sizable audience that is assumed to understand the fine points. Perhaps

a snobbish past, I see them as dikes against the corruption of Masscult and Midcult. They see standards as inhibiting, I see them as defining. They see tradition as deadening, I see it as nourishing. It may be that, as an American, I idealize the British situation. But I hope not as absurdly as they idealize ours. Last year I gave a talk on mass culture at a *Universities & Left Review* forum in London. I expected the audience, which was much younger than I, to object to my lack of enthusiasm for socialism, though it was distressing to find them still talking about capitalism and the working class in the simplistic terms I hadn't heard since I left the Trotskyists; the problems we thought about in the 'thirties seem to be just coming up now in England; the illusions we were forced to abandon through bitter experience seem still current over there. (We did have a political-intellectual community in the 'thirties here, perhaps that explains our relatively advanced thinking in this area.) But what I was not prepared for was the reaction to my attacks on Hollywood and other aspects of our mass culture. These were actually resented in the name of democracy. Hollywood to me was an instance of the corruption of art by commercialism and of the exploitation rather than the satisfying of popular tastes. But to some of those who took the floor after my talk, Hollywood was a genuine expression of the masses. They seemed to think it snobbish of me to criticize our movies and television from a serious viewpoint. Since I had been criticizing Hollywood for some thirty years, and always with the good conscience one has when one is attacking from the Left, this proletarian defense of our peculiar institution left me rather dazed.

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our closest approach to a living tradition is in sports. The recent centenaries of Poe and Melville passed without undue excitement in the press, but *Sports Illustrated* devoted four pages to the fiftieth anniversary of Fred ("Bonehead") Merkle's failure to touch second base in a World Series game.

XVIII

It is indicative of the disorganized quality of our intellectual life that, for all the remarkable increase in the consumption of High Culture since 1945, not one serious weekly has been produced. There have been a number of new "little" magazines, such as *New World Writing, The Evergreen Review, Contact, The Dial* and *The Noble Savage*—they should perhaps be called big-little magazines since they aspire to the broader circulation of the quality paperback—but, like the old ones, they are essentially anthologies. They print the best current fiction, poetry, essays and criticism—or at least what the editors think is the best—but, if only because they are quarterlies, they cannot form a center of consciousness as the English weeklies do, since this requires (1) at least monthly topical comment, and preferably weekly; and (2) a regular interchange between writers and editors and readers such as is provided in the correspondence columns of the English weeklies. (The extraordinary development of the latter is one more evidence of a cultural community; the most recondite topic may set off a spate of letters from clubs and manses, bars and offices that is finally dammed only by the editor's ritual *This correspondence must now cease.*) The nearest approach to a "center of consciousness" in our magazines is in the Midcult ones like *Harper's, The Atlantic, The Reporter* and *The Saturday Review,* and the trouble with these is that the editors consistently—one might almost say on principle—underestimate the intelligence of the readers.

A great abstract force governing our present journalism is a

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conceptualized picture of the reader. [Mary McCarthy wrote several years ago in a prospectus for a monthly of political, social and cultural comment which never materialized because we couldn't get enough backing.] The reader, in this view, is a person stupider than the editor whom the editor both fears and patronizes. He plays the same role the child plays in the American home and school, the role of an inferior being who must nevertheless be propitiated. *What our readers will take* is the watchword. . . . When an article today is adulterated, this is not done out of respect for the editor's prejudices (which might at least give us an individualistic and eccentric journalism) but in deference to the reader's averageness and supposed stupidity. The fear of giving offense to some hypothetical dolt and the fear of creating a misunderstanding have replaced the fear of advertisers' reprisals.

The new magazine's editors do not accept this picture of the reader; they make no distinction between the reader and themselves. And in fact they insist on this as a cardinal democratic premise; the only premise on which free communication between human beings can be carried on. They do not look upon *Critic* as a permanent philanthropic enterprise. They believe there are 100,000 people in a country of 150,000,000 who will buy it regularly, once they have been made aware of its existence.

As I say, the money was not raised and *Critic* did not appear. But I don't think Mary McCarthy's estimate of the possible circulation was unrealistic; a masochistic underestimation of the audience for good work in every field, even the movies, even television, is typical of the American cultural entrepreneur. Some good movies have made money, after all, and many bad ones, though concocted according to the most reliable formulae, have failed to. Nobody really knows and it seems to me more democratic, as Miss McCarthy observes, to assume that one's audience is on one's own level than that they are the "hypothetical dolts" which both the businessmen of Hollywood and the revolutionaries of the *Universities & Left Review* assume they are.

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Recently a friend had a manuscript rejected by a prominent Midcult magazine. "It's full of speculative *aperçus,*" wrote the editor, "but it's just not a 'journalistic' piece of the kind we need. What I mean is, it is *too* speculative. *I* find the speculations fascinating [they always do] but they simply go beyond the pragmatics of the problems, which are necessarily crucial to us." This attitude, of course, is neither new nor limited to this country. One recalls the report that Edward Garnett wrote in 1916 for the London firm of Duckworth, which was considering a manuscript by an obscure Irish writer:

> [It] wants going through carefully from start to finish. There are many 'longueurs'. Passages which, though the publisher's reader may find them entertaining, will be tedious to the ordinary man among the reading public. That public will call the book, as it stands at present, realistic, unprepossessing, unattractive. We call it ably written. The picture is 'curious', it arouses interest and attention. But the author must revise it and let us see it again. It is too discursive, formless, unrestrained, and ugly things, ugly words, are too prominent . . . The point of view will be voted 'a little sordid.' . . . . Unless the author will use restraint and proportion, he will not gain readers.

The book was *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man,* Mr. Garnett was one of a celebrated English literary family, and the episode (see Richard Ellmann's *James Joyce,* 416-419) shows the limitations of my cultural-community concept, if the point needs demonstrating. For the first edition of the *Portrait* was finally published by an American, B. W. Huebsch.

In some ways the closest parallel we have to the British weeklies is *The New Yorker,* which has always been edited with the assumption that the readers have the same tastes as the editors and so need not be in any way appeased or placated; the reader is the forgotten man around *The New Yorker,* whose editors insist on making their own mistakes, a formula that has worked for thirty years of successful publishing, perhaps because

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it has crystallized around the magazine a cultural community of its own. "The pragmatics of the problem" are not "crucial" to *The New Yorker,* a Midcult magazine but one with a difference. It, too, has its formula, monotonous and restrictive, but the formula reflects the tastes of the editors and not their fear of the readers. And, because it is more personally edited, there are more extra-formula happy accidents than one finds in its Midcult brethren.[9]

9. This article, in an abbreviated form, was originally written for *The Saturday Evening Post* as one of its "Adventures of the Mind" series. (The introduction of this series into the *Post* two years ago—it has included Randall Jarrell, C. P. Snow and Clement Greenberg—is an interesting symptom of the post-1945 renaissance. George Horace Lorimer never thought his magazine needed a cultural fig-leaf.) The last three sentences above about *The New Yorker,* which appear exactly as they did in the final version I submitted to the *Post,* were responsible for the article's rejection.

In the fall of 1958, the *Post* invited me to contribute an article to the series and since they offered $2500 for 5,000 words and promised to let me say what I liked, I agreed. A year later—after a five-page summary had been agreed on—I sent in the piece. They had perhaps a dozen editorial objections, all but one of which I accepted as either trivial or justified. The one difficulty was their suggestion that *The New Yorker* was just another Midcult magazine and that I must therefore criticize it in the same terms as the others. Since I did not agree with this opinion—and had in fact evaluated *The New Yorker* quite differently, though not without criticism, in the November, 1956, *Encounter*—I resisted. As the correspondence developed, it became clear they thought I was "going easy" on *The New Yorker* because I worked for it, a not unreasonable assumption in a police court but one that I somehow resented. The sentences above were my final attempt to "place" the magazine. It was rejected and so was the article ("otherwise eminently acceptable" wrote the sub-editor I dealt with.) I finally wrote to Mr. Ben Hibbs, the editor-in-chief (how perfect a name, one of Norman Rockwell's covers come to life!) complaining that I had been promised a free hand as to opinion and that the *Post* had reneged. He was not sympathetic. "We are dealing here with facts, not opinion," he replied, adding that unless I "came clean" on *The New Yorker,* the piece would be "open to suspicion of insincerity." Mr. Hibbs' notion of *fact* and *opinion* seemed to me mistaken and I wrote back citing my dictionary's definition of *fact* ("a truth known by actual experience or observation") and *opinion* ("a

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XIX

What is to be done? Conservatives like Ortega y Gasset and T. S. Eliot argue that since "the revolt of the masses" has led to the horrors of totalitarianism and of California roadside architecture, the only hope is to rebuild the old class walls and bring the masses once more under aristocratic control. They think of the popular as synonomous with the cheap and vulgar. Marxian radicals and liberal sociologists, on the other hand, see the masses as intrinsically healthy but as the dupes and victims of cultural exploitation—something like Rousseau's "noble savage." If only the masses were offered good stuff instead of *kitsch,* how they would eat it up! How the level of Masscult would rise! Both these diagnoses seem to me fallacious because they assume that Masscult is (in the conservative view) or could be (in the liberal view) an expression of *people,* like Folk Art, whereas actually it is, as I tried to show in the first part of this article, an expression of *masses,* a very different thing.

The conservative proposal to save culture by restoring the old class lines has a more solid historical basis than the liberal-cum-Marxian hope for a new democratic, classless culture. Politically, however, it is without meaning in a world dominated by the two great mass nations, the USA and the USSR, and a world that is becoming more industrialized and mass-ified all the

judgment or estimate of a person or thing with respect to character, merit, etc."). He replied suggesting the correspondence be closed. I replied agreeing but could not resist a few Parthian shots, namely: (1) in future the *Post* should employ some reliable detective agency —I suggested Pinkerton's—to make an advance assessment of the moral character of contributors to their Adventures of the Mind; (2) if I had accepted under pressure their opinion of *The New Yorker,* this should have shaken their confidence in the honesty of my other opinions; (3) the *Post* owed me $1,500— I had been foresighted enough to insist on $1,000 on delivery of the manuscript, although they seemed rather shocked at such commercialism—since they had gone back on their guarantee of freedom of expression. Like other Parthian shots, these may have been harassing to Pro-Consul Hibbs—he never replied—but, also as per history, the Romans won.

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time. The only practical thing along those lines would be to revive the spirit of the old avant-garde, that is to recreate a cultural—as against a social, political or economic—elite as a countermovement to both Masscult and Midcult. It may be possible, in a more modest and limited sense than in the past—I shall return to this point later—but it will be especially difficult in this country where the blurring of class lines, the lack of a continuous tradition and the greater facilities for the manufacturing and distribution of *kitsch,* whether Masscult or Midcult, all work in the other direction. Unless this country goes either fascist or communist, there will continue to be islands above the flood for those determined enough to reach them and live on them; as Faulkner has shown, a writer can use Hollywood instead of being used by it, if his purpose be firm enough. But islands are not continents.

The alternative proposal is to raise the level of our culture in general. Those who advocate this start off from the assumption that there has already been a great advance in the diffusion of culture in the last two centuries—Edward Shils is sure of this, Daniel Bell thinks it is probably the case—and that the main problem is how to carry this even further; they tend to regard such critics of Masscult as Ernest van den Haag, Leo Lowenthal or myself as either disgruntled Left romantics or reactionary dreamers or both. Perhaps the most impressive—and certainly the longest—exposition of this point of view appears in Gilbert Seldes' *The Great Audience.* Mr. Seldes blames the present sad state of our Masscult on (1) the stupidity of the lords of *kitsch* (who underestimate the mental age of the public), (2) the arrogance of the intellectuals (who make the same mistake and so snobbishly refuse to try to raise the level of the mass media), and (3) the passivity of the public itself (which doesn't insist on better Masscult). This diagnosis seems to me superficial because it blames everything on subjective, moral factors: stupidity (the lords of *kitsch*), perversity (the intellectuals) or failure of will (the public). My own notion is

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that—as in the case of the "responsibility" of the German (or Russian) people for the horrors of Nazism (or of Soviet Communism)—it is unjust and unrealistic to blame large social groups for such catastrophes. Burke was right when he said you cannot indict a people. Individuals are caught up in the workings of a mechanism that forces them into its own pattern; only heroes can resist, and while one can hope that everybody will be a hero, one cannot demand it.

I see Masscult—and its recent offspring, Midcult—as a reciprocating engine, and who is to say, once it has been set in motion, whether the stroke or the counterstroke is responsible for its continued action? The lords of *kitsch* sell culture to the masses. It is a debased, trivial culture that avoids both the deep realities (sex, death, failure, tragedy) and also the simple, spontaneous pleasures, since the realities would be too real and the pleasures too lively to induce what Mr. Seldes calls "the mood of consent": a narcotized acceptance of Masscult-Midcult and of the commodities it sells as a substitute for the unsettling and unpredictable (hence unsalable) joy, tragedy, wit, change, originality and beauty of real life. The masses—and don't let's forget that this term includes the well-educated fans of *The Old Man and the Sea, Our Town, J.B.,* and *John Brown's Body*—who have been debauched by several generations of this sort of thing, in turn have come to demand such trivial and comfortable cultural products. Which came first, the chicken or the egg, the mass demand or its satisfaction (and further stimulation), is a question as academic as it is unanswerable. The engine is reciprocating and shows no signs of running down.

XX

"Our fundamental want today in the United States," Walt Whitman wrote in 1871, "is of a class and the clear idea of a class, of native authors, literatures, far different, far higher in grade than any yet known, sacerdotal, modern, fit to cope with our occasions, lands, permeating the whole mass of Amer-

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ican mentality, taste, belief, breathing into it a new life, giving it decision, affecting politics far more than the popular superficial suffrage. . . . For know you not, dear, earnest reader, that the people of our land may all read and write, and may all posssess the right to vote—and yet the main things may be entirely lacking? . . . . The priest departs, the divine literatus comes."

The divine literatus is behind schedule. Masscult and Midcult have so pervaded the land that Whitman's hope for a democratic culture shaped by a sacerdotal class at once so sublime and so popular that they can swing elections—that this noble vision now seems absurd. But a more modest aspiration is still open, one adumbrated by Whitman's idea of a new cultural class and his warning that "the main things may be entirely lacking" even though everybody knows how to read, write and vote. This is to recognize that two cultures have developed in this country and that it is to the national interest to keep them separate. The conservatives are right when they say there has never been a broadly democratic culture on a high level. This is not because the ruling class forcibly excluded the masses—this is Marxist melodrama—but quite simply because the great majority of people at any given time (including most of the ruling class for the matter) have never cared enough about such things to make them an important part of their lives. So let the masses have their Masscult, let the few who care about good writing, painting, music, architecture, philosophy, etc., have their High Culture, and don't fuzz up the distinction with Midcult.

Whitman would have rejected this proposal as undemocratic, which it is. But his own career is a case in point: he tried to be a popular bard but the masses preferred James Whitcomb Riley and his first recognition, excepting Emerson's lonely voice, came from the English pre-Raphaelites, a decadent and precious group if ever there was one. If we would create a literature "fit to cope with our occasions," the only

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public the writer or artist or composer or philosopher or critic or architect should consider must be that of his peers. The informed, interested minority—what Stendhal called "We Happy Few." Let the majority eavesdrop if they like, but their tastes should be firmly ignored.

There is a compromise between the conservative and liberal proposals which I think is worth considering—neither an attempt to recreate the old avant-garde nor one to raise the general level of Masscult and Midcult. It is based on the recent discovery—since 1945—that there is not One Big Audience but rather a number of smaller, more specialized audiences that may still be commercially profitable; or if this is too ambitious a term, viable. (I take it for granted that the larger—and hence the less differentiated—the audience, the less chance there is of something original and lively creeping in, since the principle of the lowest common denominator applies.) This discovery has in fact resulted in the sale of "quality" paperbacks and recordings and the growth of "art" cinema houses, off-Broadway theaters, concert orchestras and art museums and galleries. The mass audience is divisible, we have discovered—and the more it is divided, the better. Even television, the most senseless and routinized expression of Masscult (except for the movie newsreels), might be improved by this approach. One possibility is pay-TV, whose modest concept is that only those who subscribe could get the program, like a magazine; but, also like a magazine, the editors would decide what goes in, not the advertisers; a small gain but a real one. The networks oppose this on philanthropic grounds—they don't see why the customer should pay for what he now gets free. But perhaps one would rather pay for bread than get stones for nothing.

As long as our society is "open" in Karl Popper's sense—that is unless or until it is closed by a mass revolution stimulated by the illusion of some "total solution" such as Russian-type Communism or Hitler-type Fascism, the name doesn't really matter—there will always be happy accidents because of the

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stubbornness of some isolated creator. But if we are to have more than this, it will be because our new public for High Culture becomes conscious of itself and begins to show some *espirit de corps,* insisting on higher standards and setting itself off—joyously, implacably—from most of its fellow citizens, not only from the Masscult depths but also from the agreeable ooze of the Midcult swamp.

In "The Present Age," Kierkegaard writes as follows:

In order that everything should be reduced to the same level it is first of all necessary to procure a phantom, a monstrous abstraction, an all-embracing something which is nothing, a mirage—and that phantom is the public. . . .

The public is a concept which could not have occurred in antiquity because the people *en masse in corpore* took part in any situation which arose . . . and moreover the individual was personally present and had to submit at once to applause or disapproval for his decision. Only when the sense of association in society is no longer strong enough to give life to concrete realities is the Press able to create that abstraction, "the public", consisting of unreal individuals who never are and never can be united in an actual situation or organization—and yet are held together as a whole.

The public is a host, more numerous than all the peoples together, but it is a body which can never be reviewed; it cannot even be represented because it is an abstraction. Nevertheless, when the age is reflective [i.e., the individual sees himself only as he is reflected in a collective body] and passionless and destroys everything concrete, the public becomes everything and is supposed to include everything. And . . . the individual is thrown back upon himself. . . .

A public is neither a nation nor a generation nor a community nor a society nor these particular men, for all these are only what they are through the concrete. No single person who belongs to the public makes a real commitment; for some hours of the day, perhaps, he belongs to a real public—at moments when he is nothing else, since when he really is what he is, he does not form part of the public. Made up of such individuals, of individuals at the moment when they are nothing, a public is a kind of gigantic something, an

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abstract and deserted void which is everything and nothing. But on this basis, any one can arrogate to himself a public, and just as the Roman Church chimerically extended its frontiers by appointing bishops *in partibus infidelium,* so a public is something which every one can claim, and even a drunken sailor exhibiting a peep-show has dialectically the same right to a public as the greatest man. He has just as logical a right to put all those noughts *in front of* his single number.

This is the essence of what I have tried to say in these articles.

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POEMS

I DRIVE WESTWARD

1.
I drive Westward. Tumble and loco weed
Persist. And in the vacancies of need,
The leisure of desire, whirlwinds a face
As luminous as love, lost as this place.

2. *The Tourist*
On either side of the white line
The emblems of a life appear
Distinct: purpose like lodgepole pine
Competitive and thin, and fear

Agile as aspen in a storm.
And then the twilit harboring
In a small park. The room is warm.
And by the ache of traveling

Removed from all immediacy,
From all time, I as time grows late
Sense in disordered fantasy
The sound and smell of love and hate.

3. *I, too, have been to the Huntington*
A railroad baron in the West
Built this nest,

With someone else's pick and shovel
Built this hovel,

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And bought these statues semi-nude,
Semi-lewd,

Where ladies' bosoms are revealed,
And concealed,

And David equally with Venus
Has no penis.

4. *The Pick-up*
The soft lights, the companionship, the beers,
And night promises everything you lacked.
The short drive, the unmade bed, and night in tears
Hysteric in the elemental act.

5.
It was in Vegas. Celibate and able
I left the silver dollars on the table
And tried the show. Aloha, baggy pants,
Of course, and then this answer to romance,
Her ass twitching as if it had the fits,
Her gold crotch grinding, her athletic tits,
One clock, the other counter clockwise twirling.
It was enough to stop a man from girling.

6.
I write you in my need. Please write
As simply, in terms black and white,
And do not fear hyperbole,
Uncompromising Flattery!
I can believe the best of me.

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7.
A traveler, the highway my guide,
And a little bastard of a dog
My friend. I have pin-ups for passion
As I go moseying about these scenes,
Myself improbable as yucca,
Illusory as the bright desert,
And finally here: the surf breaking,
Repetitive and varied as love
Enacted, and inevitably
The last rim of sunset on the sea.

8.
In a few days now when two memories meet
In that place of disease, waste, and desire,
Where forms receptive, featureless, and vast
Find occupation, in that narrow dark,
That warm sweat of a carnal tenderness,
What figure in the pantheon of man,
What demon is our god? What shall we call him?
Not pleasure—it is much too broad and narrow—,
Not sex, not for the moment love, but pride,
And not in prowess, but pride undefined,
Repetitive in its unthought demands,
A bit of vanity, but mostly pride.

J. V. Cunningham

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THE SNOW

Snow is in the oak.
Behind the thick, whitening
air which the wind drives,
the sun protrudes.
It presses the snow
on my pane of glass.

I remember snows and my walking
through their first fall in cities,
asleep or drunk
with the slow, desperate falling.
The snow blurs in my eyes
with other snows.

Snow is what must
come down, even if it struggles
to stay in the air with the strength
of the wind. Like an old man,
whatever I touch I turn
to the story of death.

Snow is what fills
the oak, and what covers
the grass and the bare garden.
Snow is what reverses
sidewalk, house and lawn
into the substance of whiteness.

So the watcher sleeps himself
back to the baby's eyes.
The tree, the breast, and the floor
are limbs of him, and from

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his eyes he extends a skin
which grows over the world.

The baby is what must
have fallen, like snow. He resisted,
the way the old man
struggles inside the airy tent
to keep on breathing.
Birth is the fear of death

and the source of an old hope.
Snow is what melts. I distrust
the cycles of water.
The sun has withdrawn itself
and the snow keeps falling,
and something will always be falling.

Donald Hall

DROWNING WITH OTHERS

There are moments a man turns from us
Whom we have all known until now.
Upgathered, we watch him grow,
Unshipping his shoulderbones

Like human, everyday wings
That he has not ever used,
Releasing his hair from his brain,
A kingfisher's crest, confused

By the God-tilted light of Heaven.
His deep, window-watching smile
Comes closely upon us in waves,
And spreads, and now we are

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At last within it, dancing.
Slowly we turn and shine
Upon what is holding us,
As under our feet he soars,

Struck dumb as the angel of Eden,
In wide, eye-opening rings.
Yet the hand on my shoulder fears
To feel my own wing-blades spring,

To feel me sink slowly away
In my hair turned loose like a thought
Of a fisher-bird dying in flight.
If I opened my arms, I could hear

Every shell in the sea find the word
It has tried to put into my mouth.
Broad flight would become of my dancing,
And I would obsess the whole sea,

But I keep rising and singing
With my last breath. Upon my back,
With his hand on my unborn wing,
A man rests easy as sunlight

Who has kept himself free of the forms
Of the deaf, down-soaring dead,
And me laid-out and alive
For nothing at all, in his arms.

James Dickey

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Harold Rosenberg

LITERARY FORM AND SOCIAL HALLUCINATION*

Dostoevsky in *The Diary Of A Writer* complains about literature that it does not lead to truth. "The apparent impotence of art," he writes, "made me wonder about its usefulness. Indeed, trace a certain fact in actual life—one which at first glance is not even very vivid—and if only you are able and endowed with vision, you will perceive in it a depth such as you will not find in Shakespeare."

Dostoevsky does not, like the Greek philosophers, accuse art of lying. He uses (assuming that the translation is correct) the word "impotence," and this means to strive toward an objective but to be too weak, or too distracted, to attain it. For Aristotle, the trouble with art is not that it lacks the power to present things as they are, but that it has other interests. Speaking of rhetoric, he says: "In fairness we ought to fight our case with no help beyond the bare facts"; but, he explains later, "the arousing of prejudice, pity, anger and similar emotions has nothing to do with the essential facts." It has to do with the arts of language, which were introduced by the poets and which "owing to the defects of our hearers" win out against mere evidence.

If, to the Greek, art subordinates the facts to the emotions, to the modern writer, it subordinates both facts and emotions to art's own ends. In some remarks on the poetry of Marianne Moore, T. S. Eliot gives reasons why literature does not, and

* This text is based on a lecture delivered at Brandeis University as one of the Ludwig Lewisohn Memorial Series in April, 1960.

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ought not, go to the limit in "tracing a certain fact." In a good poem, he says, there must be a "precise fitness of form and matter . . . which means also a balance between them." Like Dostoevsky, Eliot refers to Shakespeare, but points out that in a Shakespearean song, "the form, the pattern movement, has a solemnity of its own, however light and gay the human emotion concerned, and a gaiety of its own, however serious or tragic the emotion." The form, in short, carries its own independent feelings, which play against the feeling aroused by the subject; and the artist, according to Eliot, is most interested in the "fitness" of these contrasting feelings to each other, so that a "balance" may be reached.

If this is the case, the form of a literary work acts directly contrary to Dostoevsky's desire to get to the bottom of a particular state of affairs. Indeed, the very function of form would be to cut across the reaction aroused by the subject and suspend the mind in a riptide of feelings belonging to art itself.

In emphasizing balance Eliot is consistent with the attitude of literature toward truth throughout most of its history. For it is clear that writers have not, traditionally, regarded themselves as crusaders against mystification. Their way has been rather to appropriate illusions inherited in the patterns of story-telling and in the usages of words and to contribute to deepening them. It is not by chance that the meaning of "form" and the meaning of "hallucination" overlap in their connotations of an appearance or "show" without substance. There is a natural alliance between art and deception; and one needs no prompting from modern radicalism to see this alliance as the ideal extension of the relation of the arts to their historic patrons: courts, priesthoods and, in more recent times, capitalists and bureaucrats.[1] The celebrated

1. Writing about the traditional attitude toward the Nude, Paul Valéry observed: "Everyone had a muddled conviction that neither the State, nor the Law, nor Education, nor Religion, nor anything else that was serious, could *function* if the truth were entirely visible." (His italics). *Degas, Manet, Morisot.* Pantheon Books. $3.50.

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phrase about poetry inducing a "suspension of disbelief" need only be given its socio-political dimension and it becomes a formula for the service rendered by art to holders of social power. If it weren't for art, men's disbelief would not be suspended. Would not curiosity press them then to chase after the hidden truth? Form, beauty, calls off the hunt by justifying, through the multiple feelings it arouses, the not-quite-real as humanly sufficient.

> Thou, silent form! dost tease us out of thought
> As doth eternity.

Wasn't it in Richard's discussion of Keats' drugged lines about beauty being truth, truth beauty, in which the poet so perfectly draws the curtain of ecstasy over his vision of painful fact, that "suspension of disbelief" first entered the contemporary vocabulary of literary criticism?

Plato's *Republic,* which was organized "transparently," and hence had no disbeliefs to suspend, banished the poet. Actual states tolerate him, not because their rulers are more sympathetic than Plato's sages to the semi-stupors of creation but because no historical community has ever so totally perfected its means of coercion (its "order") that it could dispense with the pacifying influence of dreams reflected in broad daylight from one art to another. In the past, governments took for granted the cultural Chinese walls which the arts built around them; today, the cost of reinforcing these walls against the siege of rival concepts is included in every defense budget.[2]

Considering the function of the arts in transferring into familiar experience the hallucinations bred in the centers of authority, one might decide that the arts are by nature reaction-

2. *Note to ideology-enders.* In the war of ideologies, history grows more and more talkative, i.e., rhetorical, which means that image assaults image, until all have lost their sacredness and none inspires a defense to the death. Thus ideological conflict, which promotes rather than suspends disbelief, is the only kind of conflict among great powers in which hope can exist for a non-violent resolution.

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ary. Such a conclusion would be neither far-fetched nor particularly novel—I suspect that most liberals feel this, though they shrink from admitting it to themselves. Lionel Trilling's *The Liberal Imagination* was a recondite discussion of the likelihood that the interests of art—or as he put it with the help of a phrase of Henry James, of "the vision of the world 'raised to the richest and noblest expression' "—might be inconsistent with the interests of progress. Instead of condemning art, which would put them in uncomfortable opposition to Culture, liberals prefer to interpret or criticize its *content* and to develop programs for introducing truth and right-thinking into existing forms. Despite these efforts, there persists in liberals an embarrassed self-consciousness in regard to what art actually does, and this may be the reason for the strain and suspicion with which progressive organs such as *The New Republic,* or even *Partisan Review* and *Dissent,* tend to greet formal innovations in painting and writing. A generous enough reason: they want to be in favor of art and to forget that all of it bears the taint that Thomas Mann exposed in music, that it is "politically suspect."

Art is politically suspect—I mean from the liberal point of view—not only because it evokes and plays upon moods of sensuality and passivity; not only because every creation involves a descent at least temporary, into superstitions, fixed ideas, perverse fantasies, self-hypnosis and other outlived areas of the psyche; not only because, no matter what advances are scored by science, technology and social organization, art must still be fabricated by hand by a single individual in a manner no more efficient than in the temple of Pharaoh or a medicine man's hut. Art is above all suspect because, besides its *inherited* reactionary tendencies, it constantly arms itself anew against the world of fact; since for there to be a work of art some degree of reality must have been conceded to form. In short, the temptation of art to betrayal of the social conscience is irremediable.

But, you may be thinking, what about revolutionary literature, revolutionary painting? Is there such a thing? Not only does

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literature not make revolutions, nor, regardless of what historians say about Rousseau and the Encylopaedists, contribute to them beyond the "balanced" phrases and slogans that may be equally useful to the counter-revolution—literature is hardly even hospitable to revolutions after they have been made. *Dr. Zhivago* is but the latest example of how the literary imagination conceives social upheaval, that is, as a landslide of brutal fact by which all the gay-solemn effects of century-old forms have been crushed. It was not, as the "Left" fallacy would have it, Stalin who made the Russian Revolution unpalatable to Russian literature. Trotsky, who never hesitated to lay blame at that door, had this to say in 1935: "It takes some time for a complete overturn of social foundations, customs and assumptions to produce an artistic crystallization along new axes. How much time? One cannot say offhand, but a long time. Art is always carried in the baggage train of a new epoch, and great art . . . is an especially heavy load. . . . The influence of the October Revolution upon literature is still completely a thing of the future." The longer the Revolution lasted the farther would it put off the day when literature could come into being.

In sum, the literature of revolution appears when the revolution can be seen by looking back at it as an event of the not-too-recent past, when the revolution has stabilized itself, when it is likely that a new revolution is needed. Then literature becomes the voice ("crystallization") of the old revolution and of the social relations and fantasies it brought into being. In cutting down the pace of the Revolution, Stalin offended the intellect but made a Soviet literature of sorts possible.

The sigh of Keats and the logic of Eliot represent art's willing acceptance of the merger of substance into form—and the fabled lightheartedness of the artist, his childlike spirit, his "innocence," have to do with this professional yielding to the falsification, play-acting, and charmed distortion inherent in his medium. The abnormal thing is not the pressure upon art to falsify but that art should have come to resist that pressure. The

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doubt of Dostoevsky about the usefulness of art belongs to a new era in the history of art. Such a resistance to form—and it is the complex development of this doubt and resistance that one has in mind in speaking of *modern* art— this resistance could not but entail a conflict with art itself. In the past 100 years, art has more and more conducted wars against its own nature under the banners of various truths or of the search for experience. If Eliot, anxiously restating art's need for "precise fitness of form and matter," is typical of modern art, so, too, is Dostoevsky, in his impatience with art's inability to "trace a certain fact of actual life." One contemporary aims at restoring the rule of literature; the aim of another is to defeat literature in behalf of revelation. Often the motives crisscross in the same work—the documentation in *Moby Dick* going against its "Elizabethan" soliloquies. In addition, there is the work that makes a theme of the opposition of art and fact and derives new forms from the ambiguity; Pirandello built his theater, as well as his philosophy, upon this contradiction.[3] Theoretically, Eliot stands at one pole, Dostoevsky at the other; in their practice they move toward a common center. Especially in his early poems, Eliot is deep in the art of anti-art in which the poetically unassimilated fact plays a large part; while Dostoevsky in one of his grandest novels provides a serio-comic pantomime of art pretending to get rid of itself. Here is the opening of *The Raw Youth*:

It has suddenly occurred to me to write out word for word all that has happened to me during this last year, simply from an in-

3. "We surrealists," wrote Dali in *The Conquest of the Irrational*, "are not exactly artists, nor are we exactly real men of science . . . like the sturgeon we are carnivorous fish who swim as it were between two waters [*nager entre deux eaux*, which also means "run with the hare and hunt with the hounds"], the cold water of art and the warm water of science, and it is precisely in that temperature and swimming against the current that the experience of our life and our foundation reaches those murky depths, that moral and irrational hyperlucidity which can only be produced in the climate of Neronian osmosis." Quoted in *Salvador Dali* by Fleur Cowles.

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ward impulse, because I am so impressed by all that has happened. I shall simply record the incidents, doing my utmost to exclude everything extraneous, especially all literary graces. The professional writer writes for thirty years, and is quite unable to say at the end why he has been writing . . . I am not a professional writer and don't want to be, and to drag forth into the literary marketplace the utmost secrets of my soul and an artistic description of my feelings I should regard as indecent and contemptible. I foresee, however, with vexation, that it will be impossible to avoid describing feelings altogether and making reflections (even, perhaps, cheap ones), so corrupting is every sort of literary pursuit . . . [After more of this he goes back to the "facts," pretending to state them as baldly as possible.] I am beginning—or rather, I should like to begin—these notes from the 19th of September of last year, that is from the very first day I met—But to explain so prematurely, who it was I met before anything else is known would be cheap; in fact, I believe my tone is cheap. I vowed I would eschew all literary graces, and here at the first sentence I am being seduced by them. It seems as if writing sensibly can't be done simply by wanting to.

Apparently, the recital of facts is inadequate, if not impossible, and art will get you if you do watch out. Dostoevsky is protesting that art *has* got him, but like all anti-artists he is protesting with his tongue in his cheek; his attack on "literary graces" has become a defense of them, because he really wants most of all to create a work of art, though he has a bad conscience about it. Dada with its famous program of finishing art off split on this same issue that some (most) of its members were dealing from under the table by taking their work as constituting a new art movement.

Artists' suspiciousness concerning art has led not to the abandonment of art but to radical experiments with form. It has produced anti-formal art, a contradiction in terms, but a fruitful contradiction. It has also given us "pure" art, that is, an art that asserts the exclusively formal character of art. Recently, *in*formal art has come into being to such an extent that in France *art in-*

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formel has been tried out as a term to describe the latest painting.

Beneath these ironies there is the pressing circumstance that artists in our time have become increasingly sensible of the other-world of form as a check on, or distortion of, experience. "Con-*form*ism," significant word, manifests itself in the first instance in the use of language. The writer must choose in every sentence between the automatism of his craft and his sense of reality.

Perhaps the resistance of art to form is heightened by the presence of the mass arts, in which the powers of the traditional forms are employed for aims which artists no longer recognize as their own.

The mass arts are "formal" through and through—it is only the ambiguous advanced art that has been willing to sacrifice form to reality. There are, of course, critics who maintain that aesthetic forms have taken flight or disintegrated in modern democratic society—they like to think of present-day civilization, and particularly in America, as wallowing in a morass of fact. Yet too much reality is less the issue than the desire of these critics to substitute the fantasies of some other period—Greek, say, or Renaissance—for the prevailing ones. For the mountain of fables and images which the public absorbs daily, and which confronts it with its conception of itself and of the world, has one unfailing characteristic: obedience to traditional concepts of form. A short story in the *Saturday Evening Post,* a Western on TV, has a beginning, a middle and an end; its characters are social types recognizable from earlier literature to a lesser degree than "from life"; the action, however, superficially grounded, is motivated by issues of good-bad, honest-dishonest, hero-coward, that is, by conventions of morality and manliness. A poem in the mass media will be constructed in an established verse form (if not in the Free Verse of 40 years ago) and develop a theme more or less "universal." In short, this stuff, which is disavowed as art but of which our dream of life is made, draws at all points on art's illusory powers and without those powers it could not exist.

An essay on Russian Socialist Realism in last winter's *Dis-*

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sent showed how Soviet literature evolved a spurious classicism hospitable to the stereotypes of Communist ideology, though without succeeding in creating a form suited to that ideology. American novels likewise consist of ingredients that are formally pre-selected and pre-directed, if not pre-digested, and we, too, need an analysis of the specific social images brought into being by prevailing assumptions regarding literary art. American official literature (e.g., acceptable to book clubs, big-newspaper reviewers), though conjoined to no stated philosophy, has certain fixed concepts regarding what a novel or drama *is*—and its canons regarding scene, background, character development, etc., are sufficient to exclude both new kinds of data and unassimilated attitudes. As Socialist Realist fables promulgate hallucinations regarding the building of Socialism, American romances further delusions concerning the content of individual freedom. The large difference between Soviet and American literature is that we have from time to time a literature that openly goes against the forms that society accepts. Besides this, we have two sets of accepted forms, the openly escapist and the pseudo-serious, while the Russians have only fake seriousness in which they must combine both what they mistake as reality and yield to as dream.

We have spoken above of the traditionalism of escapist literature. As for American pseudo-serious writing, its form is the Life History; one reads life histories of Van Gogh, Jimmy Hoffa, lawyers by love possessed, a car hop, a call girl—aren't the personality story and the "profile" the chief invention of that portion of American journalism that seeks to give itself literary and intellectual airs? The composer of life histories, actual or fictitious, goes against the classicism of the popular media, in which "action" predominates over "character," and this loosening of plot to let in evolution marks it as literature and not mere entertainment.

To give the briefest sketch of the message of this form: the myth of America is that the individual exists; that anyone is

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entitled to say "I" and tell his tale in public; that one, no matter what his talents or condition, is somebody, not in the future nor as the result of what he has done, nor by family or place definition, but by the mere biological fact of having been born.

The fable of the gift of absolute being includes the opposing fantasy of being deprived, the nightmare of being nobody; in no other literature is there so much suffering from ontological handicaps, the handicap of being an artist or an adolescent or a Jew or a Negro or a wife or a husband or of not having gone to Princeton or of having been changed into a G.I. The biographical perspective of our seriously intended novels (and of our plays, which try as hard as they can to be novels) strengthens this vision of injured being with its primary resources of introspection and retrospection. The form of contemporary American fiction of itself presents the individual as infinitely free subjectively but constricted and wounded by "interpersonal relations" the minute he touches the outer world. This is as typical of tales of hucksters and flannel suiters as of poets and junkies. Here, from a prominent young fiction writer, is an example of narrative conceived as a blend of free self-examination and remembering, on the one hand, and painful interaction, on the other—that the event takes place on the meanest domestic level makes it all the more "true to form" in that the life story is taken to be interesting *per se* without larger connotations.

"Sit down, please," she said. [This sets the interpersonal scene.] "Make myself at home?" [The speaker is being ironical, since he *is* "at home" with his divorced wife.]

She smiled tolerantly. He wondered if she had any imagination of how it disturbed him to visit the place which had been his home, which in some way still was, which was so mysterious, like a room dreamed of and then found and then you're suddenly unsure of whether you really dreamed of it or only now think you did.

The story consists of an agitated pacing back and forth between the husband and his wife and the husband and his "dreamlike"

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past, the assumption being that the reader will feel interested in these people because he has "met" them.

By comparison with other literary forms, that of the life history seems to demand a minimum of patterning, and its great models in American fiction are eruptive writers like Dreiser or Wolfe. An author in this vein is permitted to dip into the informal and even the unformed, as does Mailer in *Advertisements for Myself,* and it is here that the "serious" mass writer and the literary artist tend to merge. Since meaning is held to be inherent in the life story, a major requirement is that solemnity shall not be violated—when Saul Bellow in the best of his longer works, *Henderson the Rain King,* parodied the life history by piling half a dozen lives into his hero, the reviewers did not know whether to treat the book as an allegory or resent it as literary subversion—they ended by doing both.

Contempt for form is the program of new literary generations in search of spontaneity and the facts of life. In practice, however, formlessness is simply another Look and a temporary one at that (in time, organization begins to show through the most chaotic surface). Today's automatic writing merely reminds one of the *simulated* automatism of Joyce. Nor can social hallucination (thinking and acting like a square) be overcome by suppressing the mind that might be hallucinated. The author who shakes off popular forms may wind up with popular antiform (as in "experimental" TV). As we saw in *The Raw Youth,* the denial of "literary graces" only tends to make one coy.

To honor fact, art must honor itself. After noting that, given the vision, actual life may reveal greater depths than Shakespeare, Dostoevsky backs away: "But the whole question," he exclaims, "is *whose* vision? Indeed, not only to create and write artistic works but also to discern a fact something of an artist is required." That modern literature has decided to pursue reality is only half the story; the other half is its discovery that the subversion of literary form cannot be accomplished except by literary means, that is, *through an effort essentially formal.*

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Yet it is precisely art's testing of its forms that awakens the wrath of realists of all stamps. In Russia, as everyone knows, the prime foe of official art and literature is "Formalism," that is, work in the experimental styles, from Futurism through Action Painting. American editorialists often wonder why the Russians raise so much fuss about an art "empty of content." What harm could come to the Soviet State if a few childish minds, "escaping from reality," were allowed to forge incomprehensible metaphors or to exhibit canvasses covered with red and yellow squares or splashes and dribbles of paint? Communism must feel very feeble if it finds itself menaced by an atonal score. Reasoning like this fails to take into account that, historically, "formal" art, in undermining accepted forms, has been a powerful agent in dissolving also the social stereotypes maintained by them. The Soviet propaganda chiefs have correctly estimated the threat of "vanguard" art to whatever suspends disbelief in the Party image of life.

In the democracies, aesthetic revolts are always the order of the day. Yet "formal" art lives pinned down by the drum-fire of the press. Angry Young Men are welcome, nay institutionally indispensable, so long as they rage within the recognized modes. Indignation, however, that finds expression in stale technical devices may as well save its steam. "More respectable novels are being produced now than in any previous period," states a report on the literary situation in Britain.[4] Quickly, the author finds himself discussing the relation of form to truth. "Twenty years ago writers as different from each other as Joyce and Aldous Huxley, Isherwood and Virginia Woolf were all making experiments with the treatment of time. For them the straightforward chronological narrative of the conventional novel was a falsification of real experience. In our minds we do not move forward so mechanically: we leap from point to point, somersault suddenly backwards, bring together moments widely separated in

4. Gabriel Gersh, *The New Leader,* March 28, 1960.

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objective time. Following the theories of Bergson and the great experimental novel of Proust, these novelists tried to treat time in a personal way. What remains today of these extraordinary attempts? The drab technique of the flashback. It is typical of the modern British novel's ossification that all these attempts to find a more truthful treatment of time have been left without a sequence."

America in its businesslike moods disregards the problems of form altogether; when it wants to "get the facts," it turns to eyewitness reporting and to the social sciences; the daily and weekly press and studies like *Middletown* or *The Organization Man* give Americans a strong, even bitter, sense of being in touch with the real thing. Actually, of course, news and surveys contend with fact in accordance with forms of their own.

The effort toward fact is the most intense problem of American literature today. "Nothing, I submit," testifies a writer in answer to a question on the special needs of writing today, "nothing is more difficult than deciphering what the citizens of this time and place actually feel and think. They do not know themselves; when they talk, they talk to the psychiatrist; on the theory, presumably, that the truth about them is ultimately unspeakable. . . . The writer trapped among a speechless people is in danger of becoming speechless himself. For then he has no mirror, no corroborations of his essential reality; and this means that he has no grasp of the reality of the people around him."

It is interesting that the author then draws the currently popular conclusion regarding artistic spontaneity. "What the times demand," he goes on, "and in an unprecedented fashion, is that one *be*—not seem—outrageous, independent, anarchical, That one be thoroughly disciplined—as a means of being spontaneous. That one resist at whatever cost the fearful pressures placed on one to lie about one's own experience. For in the same way that the writer scarcely ever had a more uneasy time, he has never been needed more."

How will being outrageous, anarchical, disciplined and spon-

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taneous help the writer to grasp the reality of the people around him? Particularly of people who are the opposite of disciplined and spontaneous? To get to their truth, one should, it would seem, take hold of the forms that beset their consciousness, rather than cleanse oneself through immediacy.

If, however, there are misunderstandings in this statement (by James Baldwin),[5] criticism shares the responsibility. Its way has been either to lay siege to the writer in the name of technical skill or to expound "content" as if form were a mere market basket. But to miss the point about the meaning of form is, inevitably, to miss it about fact. A critic who snubs a work for its formal audacity, seeing the preoccupation with form as the antithesis of the large "human" statement and as indicative of a taste for distortion, will, most likely, shrink from the radical events and personages of the age. Such a critic dreams of an identity of beauty and truth; in practice he admires works and ideas in which the edges of both have been softened.

Having once set itself against social hallucination, literature will never recover its easy conscience of the epochs of "higher truth." Literature will go on lying—history, however, has deprived it of the capacity to adore its lies. Literary truth, a contradiction in terms, has become a moral issue for every writer, but the will to sincerity, which gives him such an "uneasy time," cannot satisfy itself except by aesthetic means.

5. *Fiction of the Fifties,* selected by Herbert Gold. Doubleday & Co. New York. 1959.

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Ramón Sender

THE TERRACE

In Miss Slingsby's house lived a dog with a mother-of-pearl collar, a castrated Siamese cat, and a parrot that knew how to say "come again" to callers as they were departing. For Miss Slingsby these three animals represented nature.

But Miss Slingsby died. With her hatred of extremes she would have preferred to give the impression that she was dying only a little, but she died, totally and forevermore. Four days later Miss Slingsby's remains had been cremated and there, on the jasper mantelpiece beside the Dresden clock, was a small gold box with the inscription: "Ellen Slingsby.—1887-1945.—Laus Deo." Under this inscription was the name of the funeral home responsible for the cremation: "The Elysian Fields, Inc."

When the cook called for the ashes she was told that they were usually kept at the mortuary until they were cold. Otherwise as they cooled small particles might move inside the box, making some slight sound, which sensitive people could associate with the soul of the deceased.

Insisting that this did not matter, the cook left with the still tepid ashes of Miss Slingsby.

About midday the lawyer, Mr. Arner, arrived at Miss Slingsby's home. He was a middle aged man, blond and lean, with a silhouette that somehow reminded one of a kangaroo. He was scraping off the soles of his shoes on the felt mat when the door opened.

The house was hushed. Mr. Arner took out a visiting card and presented it to the maid. She read: "Froilan Arner, Attor-

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ney-at-Law." She handed the card to the cook, the cook passed it on to the chauffeur who, not knowing what to do, returned it to the lawyer. Evidently a man of orderly habits, he put it back in his cardcase. Then he sat down, blew his nose, apologetically, opened his brief case and said:

"The dog, cat and parrot are also required to be present."

They were brought in at once. The attorney asked:

"This is the dog named Merlin?"

Upon hearing his name the dog tried to wag his tail but, since he had none, he started moving his hind quarters with a discreet acceleration.

"This is the cat called David?"

The cat turned its head and contemplated the attorney with little interest.

"This is the parrot named George?"

The parrot screeched:

"Come again."

Mr. Arner announced that he was going to read Miss Slingsby's last will and testament. The maid was seated on the edge of her chair, her feet crossed, her knees together and bent to one side. The chauffeur looked at her, thinking: "She does look like a lady."

In the silence the cat occasionally heard a sound somewhere, pricked up his ears and looked around intrigued. The cook suspected that he was hearing the ashes inside the box.

Mr. Arner read the preamble and then the executive part of the will. "To the dog Merlin, who in all probability will not live over seven years, I bequeathe ten thousand dollars. To the cat David, who may also live six or seven years, I bequeathe fifteen thousand dollars. To the parrot George, whose life may yet be prolonged for more than forty years, I bequeathe thirty thousand dollars. These sums are for veterinary fees, when necessary, as well as living expenses and entertainment, since the general upkeep of the house, which will continue to be cared for by the maid so long as any of the three animals shall live, is pro-

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vided for in section B-3. I recommend frequent renovation of the tropical décor in the bridge room where the parrot feels so contented, and I suggest that he be made to forget the phrase *come again* and learn another more in keeping with the new circumstances of his life." Upon hearing his name the parrot repeated the expression, accompanying it by a slight trill.

The chauffeur was hoping the maid would look at him, but aware of this she continued looking "nowhere," and wondering what new phrase they should teach George.

Mr. Arner went on reading: "To the servants I bequeathe, in turn, the following sums: To Jane, the maid, ten thousand dollars. To Herbert, the chauffeur, five hundred dollars." (The chauffeur allowed an exclamation of quite impertinent disgust to escape him and the others held their breath). To Bertha, the cook, eight thousand dollars."

The chauffeur conjectured: "Why five hundred to me?" He could discover no reasons for so unjust a difference. But Mr. Arner was still reading: "To the sanatorium for mental diseases on Coronado Avenue, two hundred thousand dollars to be distributed as follows: fifty thousand for the construction of a chapel of the same faith as the church of my grandparents. The rest to cover the expenses of a party to take place every month in said sanatorium. It is my wish that a monthly celebration with dancing be held for the mentally ill of the masculine sex, to be attended by girls from the city as well as by the women servants of my household. Another party for the women patients to which men will be invited, I shall expect Herbert the chauffeur to attend. With these parties it is my desire to give the poor sick people a little social life to make their sad situation more bearable.

"Trustee and administrator of these funds will be Mr. Froilan Arner."

The will caused a sensation. The maid looked through the windows at the high cement walls visible beyond the residential section, and the terrace overlooking them. There was the sana-

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torium. "But why should Miss Slingsby want the insane people to dance?" she wondered.

The attorney finished the reading and rose, ready to take his leave. As the door opened the parrot cried out: "Come again." The maid ordered him to be quiet, her finger on her lips. Then she looked at the others and asked:

"What new phrase shall we teach him?"

Lowering her eyes, the cook proposed a pious theme: *Rest in Peace.* Herbert suggested a patriotic one: *Viva Massachusetts!* which was Miss Slingsby's native state although she had always lived in Cibola.

The cook was resting her elbow on the table and meditating on why Miss Slingsby obliged her to dance once a month with the insane in the sanatorium. She did not know what meaning to give this wish of her mistress. She stood up, sighed, took the small box from the mantle with both hands, as one holds a sacred object, and prepared to leave. In the street she met a priest who asked in a pained tone if the body of the poor lady was still in the house. The cook pointed to her pocketbook and said: "No, poor dear, I have her here."

She walked to the neighborhood church still pondering: "Forgive me, God, but why do the insane need to dance?"

Half an hour later when she returned home, she surprised the maid sitting on the chauffeur's knees, his arms around her waist. The startled maid jumped up, began screaming and, covering her mouth with her hand, ran off in the direction of the garden. The chauffeur went after her, pleading, and after him the dog Merlin, barking.

Herbert and the maid were married three weeks later. The cook thought: "This would have pleased Miss Slingsby."

Two months later the first dance in the sanatorium was held. The director Dr. Smith presented the estimate before the party and Arner wrote him a check. The only expenses were for an orchestra and the cold buffet supper served the guests. Miss Slingsby's will was being carried out. Mr. Arner figured that the

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remaining hundred and fifty thousand dollars, after giving fifty thousand for the building of the chapel, could bring in five percent annually, well administered, or seven thousand, five hundred dollars. And he hesitated.

He had not intended going to the dance, although he did feel a certain curiosity about the women suffering from mental disorders, especially if they were young and pretty. This was not an unhealthy curiosity. So he went to the sanatorium. The night was cool and mild, with a yellowish desert moon. The moon of the desert of Cibola.

As he entered the vestibule and found himself surrounded by marble over which his own shadow glided smoothly, he remembered that he had had a shoeshine and haircut, important details when one is going to a party, even a party for madmen.

He moved forward feeling his feet sink into the thick carpeting and thinking of poor Miss Slingsby who wanted the insane to dance after her death.

It was certainly a pleasant place. Marble that was not marble, rugs of coco fiber that was not coco, aluminum murals that were not aluminum. But everything clean and tidy. In the air welcoming him was the odor of wax and freshly cut grass intermingled, not the typical hospital smell.

It suddenly occurred to him that, thanks to Miss Slingsby and to him, the poor patients in the sanatorium were going to have a delightful evening. Arner felt like an instrument of providence.

In the elevator he met the director, Dr. Smith. A physician fifty years old with modern ideas, although he was in the habit of speaking of them as if he were not quite sure. Other people were in the elevator, among them the good bourgeois of Germanic air and gold-rimmed glasses that one is likely to find in elevators and who, as the elevator goes up, appears to be thinking: "Just watch me raising myself by my own merits."

"In what part of the building is the dance?" Arner asked.

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"On the terrace," replied the director, at the same time bowing to another guest.

The director's profile had something about it that suggested certain fishing birds. As the elevator stopped the doors opened quietly. They entered a corridor like the one on the ground floor. Arner remarked that he knew the name of one of the patients: Matilda Strolheim. He had been a friend of her husband, an aviator who made a reputation for himself during the Second World War. He still flew in jet planes now and then. He was quite rich, Strolheim. Thinking of the aviator's wealth, Arner asked himself if it would not be a good thing to invest Miss Slingsby's money in air transport stock.

As he looked toward the terrace he heard the director say: "Yes, Matilda Strolheim. You see? The party is outdoors, so people can smoke. But," he added, "I don't have much faith in such things."

The terrace was spacious and above the balustrade was a grating supporting a heavy wire mesh. In a whisper Arner asked if all the women there were insane and the director replied:

"In any case, only those who are tranquil may come to the party, don't worry."

"No, I'm not worried," Arner hastened to say.

"And don't use the word *insane* here. They are not insane, they are ill."

Everything seemed natural and with no signs of violence. Only the silence was extraordinary as if they were in a temple. Suddenly music broke the silence and lightened the atmosphere. Afraid of their own nerves the patients lowered their voices. The men imitated them, unconsciously. They were townspeople who had been carefully chosen before receiving invitations.

"They say that you psychiatrists are slightly abnormal too," ventured Arner. "Is this so?"

"Yes," laughed the doctor. "Choosing this profession would seem to be an indication."

"A symptom?"

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"No, no, only an indication."

The orchestra was playing seated on a small platform.

"Percussion instruments are exciting," the director remarked. "Stringed instruments, on the other hand, are soothing and tranquilizing."

Everything on the terrace was grey and neutral. A guest approached Dr. Smith, saying:

"I'm going to San Francisco tomorrow. You know my heart is a little . . . well, do you think I can fly? I ask because people do die in airplanes."

"People also die in bed," countered the doctor, raising his birdlike head.

The guest boldly made his way out onto the terrace. The attorney Arner thought: "I didn't believe Dr. Smith had a sense of humor." He asked if Miss Slingsby's chauffeur was attending the dance and the director assured him he was. Then Mr. Arner wished to find out which patient was Mrs. Strolheim and the doctor said:

"The one there to the right of the dance floor, and who is just now touching her necklace. Don't look at her. She realizes we're talking about her."

At the table beside Matilda another patient was crying like a child while a nurse, who was trying to calm her, offered her a cigarette, lighting it for her. Arner asked:

"Do they behave rationally?"

"Yes, don't worry."

"I told you before that I'm not worried, doctor."

At the table level the air on the terrace was the same quiet air of the inside rooms. But a little higher, wild outdoor breezes were blowing.

Many small tables were scattered about the terrace, each with a little lamp. These lights in the declining paleness of evening had a cold fluid quality. In the middle of the terrace the dance floor gleamed, freshly. At the back a nurse was preparing refreshments behind a wide table covered with a cloth.

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The attorney was prying around discreetly, playing at discriminating between the insane women who revealed some symptoms and those who seemed completely normal. From time to time Arner's eyes sought the noble solitary figure of Matilda.

The attorney remembered how the Arabs consider the madman a supernatural being, venerating and reverencing him. Glancing at some of the women he noticed that their expressions became sweeter under the influence of the waltz the orchestra was playing. Those madwomen awakened in him, even though he was not an Arab, a strange, superstitious inclination.

Arner imagined he saw Miss Slingsby—her lovable ghost—in the center of the dance floor, presiding over the dancing with her silver cane.

Above the terrace hung an immense violet sky with here and there a star. The moon was hidden behind the high wall topped by the television antenna.

Arner was aware of an animal taciturnity in some women. He said so and Dr. Smith agreed, adding that instinctive life was very strong in these patients.

"Stronger than in you or in me," he observed.

"What does Dr. Smith know about my instinctive life?" Arner mused, slightly uncomfortable. And again he wondered what he could do with Miss Slingsby's money. It didn't seem right to keep it immobilized in the bank.

Arner's financial ideas were sometimes very original and he dared not mention them to his banker friends.

Years ago it had occurred to him that the manufacture of masks of delicate and fine artificial skin, reproducing the features of movie stars, would be a great success. All men are in love with some movie star. The mask of that heroine on the wife's face would be charming on occasion. Every time he thought about it he felt slightly ashamed and said to himself: "That's a perverse idea. Like hypocritically rationalizing adultery." He rejected it but the seed stayed in his mind.

It was now dark. Above the balustrade the vertical bars of

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the grating supporting the heavy mesh were visible. At the top these bars were bent toward the inside, to prevent anyone who might climb up the grating from peering over and maybe falling or deliberately throwing himself down into the street.

Reflections from the small table lamps were coloring the mesh red and yellow.

The director and the attorney sat down at an unoccupied table near the dance floor. Mr. Arner looked with some insistence at Matilda who, realizing this, returned his glance in a natural and friendly way. She had a pure, oval face, a warm complexion, and wide blue eyes.

"I think you ought to dance with her," the physician suggested.

Arner invited Matilda to dance. She was rather stiff despite her youth and he could not lead her easily. Arner decided to let her do the leading, but they did not get along that way either. Then he apologized and asked; laughing: "Do you want to be a good girl and obey me?" She smiled: "I have always wanted to obey. Since they brought me here, at least."

"Not before?"

"That's what they say. But now I'm a good girl."

As he passed near them, the director flattered Arner:

"Eh, doctor, where in the devil did you learn how to dance so well?"

Some people called Arner doctor because he had a doctorate in jurisprudence from Yale. But Matilda misunderstood:

"As soon as I saw you I knew you were a doctor," she said.

Arner dared not undeceive her. A windblown lock of her hair tickled his forehead, reminding him that they were out in the open. Matilda added:

"I like doctors from outside the sanatorium better than those inside."

"That's natural, I suppose."

"Not so natural. But in reality the sanatorium doctors aren't human. The director Smith looks like one of those stuffed

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birds you see in museums. And pardon the extravagance, but it's true."

"Yes, a fishing bird," said Arner.

At that moment the orchestra was playing softly, with muted instruments, and Arner kept still. Not a voice could be heard on the terrace and the attorney admitted that it was true, the director did look like a bird. But why stuffed?

Just then the director was thumbing his way through some papers which he had removed from a small portfolio, and between his lips he was holding a silver pencil, crosswise. Now he did have the profile of a bird with a fish in its beak.

Arner and Matilda continued dancing. The corner of a tablecloth swaying in the breeze gave a sensation of pleasant abandon. Matilda spoke:

"Since you are a doctor I'm going to confide in you."

Arner was about to tell her that he was not a medical doctor, but she was speaking again:

"I am not insane," Matilda assured him.

Arner started talking about the errors of science. She shook her head:

"No, that's not it. I am actually as sick as anybody else, but at this moment I am as sane as you. I am only insane three or four days every month. You can tell a doctor everything, can't you? I'm only insane on my *lunar* days."

Arner was thinking that here was the first misunderstanding of the evening. It was doubtless inevitable at a party of mental patients, and this remark about lunar days must be common among nurses and doctors. He looked at her eyes and saw in her an immense trust. At that moment he heard an echo—the echo of the orchestra—in some distant corner of the terrace, in some fold of the high night.

Matilda waited for Arner to say something.

"Doesn't my sickness seem odd to you?" she asked.

"No. I don't believe that yours is a real sickness," Arner ventured.

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She seemed to take offense at Arner's words:

"No? You haven't seen me in one of those crises. When the lunar days come it's as if I fall into a dark well. And nobody can tolerate me. Everything around me seems to be ending and I feel that I am never going to see the light of day again. I understand that you want to help me and that's why you say I'm not ill. It must be difficult for you doctors to come to a party like this, and talk with us, because you want to make us believe that we are normal and this is kind, but also rather ridiculous and, as Dr. Smith says, contraindicated. A normal person can be deceived, but it's much harder to deceive an insane one. Really. Nature gives us some compensation. It takes away our intelligence but gives us flashes of genius once in a while. And in those flashes we see more than you do, I believe. And sometimes we divine hidden things."

Matilda's smile revealed that madness could also be a state of grace now and then. Arner grinned foolishly and thought: "This girl doesn't need any movie heroine's mask to be seductive."

Over the terrace a bat was flying back and forth. Arner said to himself: "It looks like two bats, but there is only one and its shadow." And he asked:

"Do you feel so bad during those lunar days?"

"You can't imagine. They have to put me in a straight jacket and take me to a room where the floor and walls are padded."

Arner was silent, impressed, and suddenly it occurred to him that what people said about Matilda could be true. They said that she had tried to kill her second husband. Matilda went on talking:

"Here am I just as you see me, so reasonable, but when I fall into one of those crises I become a wild animal. Once I tore open a vein with my teeth and since then they put me in a straight jacket. Even so . . . again I bit my tongue, hurt myself. Don't you hear that I can't pronounce some words distinctly? I

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turn *r* into *l*, and *s* into *th*. I speak in a very confused way, doctor."

Arner declared that this made her pronunciation graceful and childlike. She thanked him with her look and the attorney continued:

"I don't really believe you're ill. Of course I cannot speak as a physician but as a big brother. What happens to you during the lunar days is more natural then the tranquility of women we call normal. I'm serious. Your reactions are in response to a logic far above the common and ordinary."

He spoke glancing toward the director in the distance who still had his fish in his beak. But Matilda was in his arms and he was thinking: "This woman bewilders me. I say these things by chance, but at bottom they contain some truth. Nature is not likely to make mistakes. Men are mistaken. Matilda has no children. Nevertheless she is a woman who was born only to have them. She was meant to be impregnated in early adolescence. Nature gave her that body, that neat and appealing warmth of her lips, that quiet promise in her eyes. None of her ovules, none of her possibilities of becoming pregnant, should have been lost." And Arner wondered what could have happened with Bob, her second husband, in other words, what truth there could be to the story of the poisoning. For they said that she had tried to poison him. She looked Arner in the eyes, waiting for him to go on talking:

"Your nervous disorder," he began again, "is a natural manifestation of the order of nature. I mean, Mrs. Strolheim, that an ovule that is lost can represent in a certain way the blasted hope of this humanity to which we belong, and maybe of the planet itself on which we live. It sounds light and trivial, but it can be grave. Really, Mrs. Strolheim, it can be tremendous."

She was listening with a serenity that had a double meaning. Arner started to repeat his words, but she interrupted:

"I understand. And if this is true, what does nature want of

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me? Why does it protest with me in this way? Why with me and not with other women?"

For a moment Arner thought that his seductive mask business might be immoral. Worse than a perversion: an aberration.

Matilda repeated her question and Arner felt inhibited by the need to be precise:

"Who knows, Mrs. Strolheim? If you had become pregnant maybe an extraordinary man would have been born to you. An exceptional being. Maybe the man humanity has needed for years. That all humanity needs and has been expecting for centuries."

Arner was being carried away and Matilda thought that it was because her clinical case had made such an impression on him, rather than her beauty.

"Do you believe that, doctor? No one has ever spoken to me as you have," she said timidly and sincerely. "What can the planet expect of me? Are you telling me that it does expect something?"

"A son. A new man. Your child could be the solution."

"What solution?"

"Humanity always needs a solution."

"But what?"

Arner had never found himself in a situation like this before either, talking as a physician to a beautiful madwoman. Her eyes were still questioning and Arner could do no less than reply:

"The son you might have could be someone, understand? I am an ordinary man. There are millions like me. But some men in our time have had a great influence, like Freud, Gandhi, Lenin, and especially Einstein. Nevertheless nature does not stop with them. It can never stop with anybody. It goes ahead with its desires and necessities, which we still don't understand, nor will we probably ever succeed in understanding. Yet nature has its ideal. And searches for it, in one way or another. You beautiful women are the agents of this natural miracle."

She was looking solemn, although she had an urge to laugh.

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She was probably thinking that the doctor was also slightly insane.

"What can nature's ideal be?" she insisted.

Arner was growing weary, feeling that Matilda was pushing him to confused and brilliant fields in which he feared he might lose his way. Oh, those faces where intelligence slumbers, how they can stir up ours at times! But he maintained a calm exterior.

"I don't know what nature's ideal is," he said. "Only a man of genius could imagine that. And I am just an *homo vulgaris.*"

She laughed and this encouraged Arner to continue along the same line:

"An *homo simplicisimus.*"

Now she was shaking her head:

"That's not true. No one is sincere when he says something like that. Neither are you."

The attorney thought: "Here we have an intelligent opinion." And she went on with her inquisitiveness:

"You believe that nature expects so much of me?"

"That's what I dare to assume, seeing the reactions imposed upon you by nature. Nature does not protest with other women. Just assume that if the men who can destroy this world have already been born" (he was referring to the specialists in nuclear physics), "the world may not want to die and is waiting for those who could save it. One of those men could be born any day. And he will have to be born to some woman. I only want to make it clear to you that, for all these reasons, your case is a state of natural tension rather than a disease. You understand. Men now exist who can disintegrate matter, who are already speculating with *anti-matter.* Creation may need other men who can reintegrate it, forming higher syntheses. The world cannot stand still, passively. It must go on evolving or die. And we can't forget that the man who may save us will be born to a woman.

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Understand? Nothing that lives must stop living, if we can help it. On those lunar days when you cry in your room . . ."

"I don't cry. Scream, that's what I do, scream. You should hear me."

"All right, when you feel yourself falling into that well, and you scream and want to throw yourself against the wall and tear open your veins with your teeth, it isn't you alone, but the entire planet that is falling into the darkness because it sees its hope endangered. The savior might be born to you."

After saying the words "planet" and "savior," he was sorry. He should not let himself be so utterly carried away. For the first time, however, she appeared capable of understanding. Yet what she said was somewhat out of line:

"You must be a rather queer doctor. But I like queer people. My second husband was like that too—Bob, I mean. And as for me, well, I had the reputation of a freak, have no doubt of that. Before coming here I was something like a savage and dangerous wildcat. Now, as you see, I'm a gentle little lamb. I listen to you and begin to think you might be right. If so, isn't my case tremendous?"

At that instant someone overturned an ice bucket and the ice cubes spilled merrily over the floor. Here even the slightest incident had enormous repercussions. On some of the cubes the lamp light played delicately. Several people formed a kind of safety cordon, so that no one would slip on the ice and fall. Meanwhile they were all picking it up. The director himself, Dr. Smith, with his fish face, got down on all fours to gather up some ice cubes underneath a table.

A nurse grabbed her skirts on seeing a little piece of ice slide over the floor, as if it were a mouse.

Arner and his partner continued dancing. When the music ended, Matilda led Arner to the buffet. She served two plates, which they carried to a free table, As he passed near the orchestra Arner's foot brushed the enormous mass of the base viol, which vibrated for some seconds. Arner glanced around for Dr.

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Smith, but did not see him. And he reflected: "This party alone cost eight hundred and twenty-three dollars and twenty cents. If Miss Slingsby's money were invested, it could earn substantial profits. For the sanatorium patients, of course."

On the terrace the night appeared to be more dense. Outside the enclosure things were black and remote.

"You know," Matilda remarked with a rather childlike coquettry, "I wish this night could be longer than the others. As long as some nights I knew before coming to the sanatorium. An interminable night, shall we say?"

"Oh," said Arner with alarm.

"There are long nights and short nights. Some can last ten hours, twenty hours, two weeks. And more. I believe there could be a night without end."

Arner listened with misgiving and said nothing. Matilda was gazing at an ice cube on the tablecloth. Its angles decomposed the light and blue, rose, and green tints appeared. The table lamp had a shade with red and black designs. Arner spun it around to see the complete figure of one of those birds the Indians weave into their rugs and paint on ceramic objects. Arner was realizing that the calls of the universe for hope had led her on to the "infinite night." Such exaltations were contagious. And he said, prudently straying from the subject:

"That bird on the lampshade is not the storm thunderbird, because if it were it would have the form of a cross and be a front view with spread wings. This is a profile. See? The Zuñi bird is always a profile, I believe. As painted by the Indians, I mean."

Lowering his voice, he added:

"It looks a little like Dr. Smith, true enough. But the bird of the Zuñis, like the thunderbird, is sacred. All birds are sacred among the Indians because they come down from the sky where the rain is made. In that, their sacredness, they differ from Dr. Smith."

"Don't you believe it. For some patients the director is also

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sacred and that is understandable, don't you think so, Dr. Arner?"

The orchestra was playing again, but they remained seated at their table. The director was eyeing them from a distance. He no longer had the silver pencil in his mouth.

Pursuing the neutral theme, Arner remarked that the Zuñis have not only abandoned nomadism and the hunting of wild animals, but they also have household gods like the Greeks and Romans do. Before dwelling in a room the Zuñis wait for the Indian lares to bless it. The most important of those lares is the one they call Shalako.

"I can't go into a new house either," she said, "unless somebody else, a relative or friend, is there to receive me. The same thing happens to me as to the Zuñis. But that doesn't matter. I have confidence in things, really. When a serious problem comes up and there seems to be no solution, everything can still be arranged. Everything can always be arranged."

"How?" Arner asked, uneasily.

"Very simple. By making the night longer. Because time is elastic and nothing is easier than to stretch or shrink time."

She said this lightly, looking at the lamp and thinking about the profile of the Zuñi bird.

Just then Miss Slingsby's former chauffeur came up to invite Matilda to dance. Arner thought: "Dr. Smith has sent him over to keep Matilda from being too long with me, or with the same person, at least." But it was not true. Dr. Smith himself came over shortly and sat down at Arner's table. Matilda and the chauffeur were dancing.

"Have you talked to Mrs. Strolheim about her husband?" asked the director.

"No, no."

Out on the dance floor the chauffeur was saying to his partner:

"I will always come to these dances and my wife will come to those organized for the men. Out of respect to Miss Slingsby's

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memory. We won't miss a single party. My wife and I have always had the best opinion of you, I want you to know. We never believed you ever tried to poison anybody. Miss Slingsby didn't think so either."

Matilda made a strange movement and broke away from him.

"Maybe," said the chauffeur, "I have stirred up the ashes of your old memories, without meaning to. Please excuse me."

Matilda said that she did not feel well and would prefer to return to Arner's table. The chauffeur accompanied her. She sat down beside the attorney, thinking about her husband Bob who had suffered the effects of the poison she had given him some time back. He suffered the effects, but did not die.

Meanwhile the two men—the director and Arner—were still talking about the Zuñi Indians.

"For the Indians water is also a divine element," said Arner and added, looking at his friend's nose: "And also fishing birds."

Matilda remembered, in spite of the fact that the chauffeur did not believe it, that she had indeed tried to poison both her husbands. But that had happened during her lunar days. Maybe she could be forgiven if what Dr. Arner had told her were true. At that moment they called Dr. Smith from another table and the physician left. The attorney continued with the Indian theme.

At another table nearby a patient was lowering her head and raising her shoulders from time to time with a convulsive movement. Matilda said that the poor dear heard airplanes in the air and thought that they were passing dangerously near her head. Then Mrs. Strolheim fell silent, thinking about her second husband Bob. She had not received any flowers from him for some time. And she said in a loud voice:

"He usually sends them to me from the most faraway places. In special plastic boxes. From Holland, Spain, Turkey."

She sighed and said that her husband had gone somewhere with his elastic night and a small tube of cyanide of mercury in his pocket, but he sent her flowers and sometimes books along

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with the flowers. She did not read them. She gave them to the sanatorium library and they wrote her name inside the cover.

"What a calm night!" said Arner.

The moon was now rising over the television antenna and was no longer yellow but blue.

"Don't think that our beautiful sanatorium is always so calm. If there were only women, maybe, but there are men and once in a while something unexpected and terrible happens. For instance, last year a madman escaped. A friend of mine. Well, although I consider him a friend of mine, I have never talked to him. Dr. Smith, who is a little pedantic, says that our friendship is a case of telesympathy. The madman escaped, misbehaved in some way, and seeing himself pursued hid in the factory you see yonder. Don't you see the smokestack? To flee from the orderlies and police he started climbing up the spikes in the smokestack until he reached the very top, over two hundred feet high. When he got up there he stripped and there he was, cool as a cucumber, sometimes seated, sometimes standing. Leaning on the lightning rod. The poor fellow could not flee horizontally as they would have caught him at once with their automobiles and motorcycles, and so he tried to escape vertically by climbing up the smokestack. But vertical flight isn't for living beings, is it? It's only for the dead. He stayed on top of that smokestack for three days. Meanwhile the factory couldn't operate because they didn't want to suffocate him with the smoke. And the whole city talked about the case, in the streets, restaurants, churches. Yes, in the churches, too. They photographed him and published the pictures in the papers."

She had one of the pictures, but only the negative. And suddenly she decided to show it to Arner. "You'll see." She took out of her purse a sheet of dark film and handed it to him. Arner held it against the light. The chimney top was visible and on top a small nude man leaning on the lightning rod. Naked, up so high, the madmen looked like the statue of Neptune with his trident. "It's like the counterfigure of Bob," she said. "See?

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Behind him all the infinite night." And this she said with a great complacency. "Although Bob didn't have the night behind but in front of him," she added.

Arner was surprised and somewhat to blame, he felt, for Mrs. Strolheim's excitement, with the counterfigure of Bob and the infinite night. A patient passing by bent over Arner's hand, which was resting on the edge of the table. She acted as if she were going to kiss it, but she merely gazed at it closely and attentively. Then she said: "The veins."

"Don't pay any attention," said Matilda. "It's a game. An innocent game. I'm thinking about what you said before. I believe you're right. Maybe if I had had a son things would have been different. And now I would not be ill. But I think Bob is sterile. Flying at great heights makes some pilots sterile, understand? But, do you see the counterfigure of Bob in the picture? Don't you see it?"

She showed it to him again. Arner wanted to distract her and started making trivial observations. For example, that in the land of Cibola there were more painters per square mile than any place else on earth. Furthermore, there was a desert with a sphinx. The sphinx was a stone camel to the left of the highway going north from Santa Fe. A camel made by natural erosion. The peculiar characteristics of Cibola did not end there, however. The dogs of the Indians spend day and night burying bones for the anthropologists of the future—Matilda snickered. Indians sometimes have three names: one Spanish, another Indian, and another English, and they carefully conceal all three —she laughed more openly. Strangers their first year in Cibola learn six Spanish words which they pronounce in French. Finally the second year they buy a guitar. She laughed outright at this and Arner felt gratified. "I'm a skillful man," he reflected, although modestly.

But Matilda forgot about these pleasantries and was gazing at the top of the enclosed grating above the balustrade, thinking: "They've put up that grating to keep me from jumping off head

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first down into the street." And she felt grateful to the administration for its foresight.

Mr. Arner wanted to go back to his joking and his definitions of Cibola: "This is the most cosmopolitan state in the union. Here one can find Spaniards, Englishmen, Argentinians, Frenchmen, Canadians, Russian exiles, Italians, Greeks. And even people from Brooklyn."

This, said with comical emphasis, made Matilda smile still, but the first effect had worn off. And she was brooding: "Bob hasn't sent me any flowers for exactly eighteen days." Arner wanted to return to his jesting:

"Do you know how to dance the Varsoviana, Mrs. Strolheim?"

"No."

"Have you ever seen a saucer fly, in other words, a flying saucer?"

"No, I haven't, doctor."

"Did you ever pass a truck in the highway carrying an atomic bomb?"

"I don't know. You know we almost never leave the sanatorium."

But Bob was on her mind and she could not see any connection between her own presence in the sanatorium and the poison mentioned by her recent dancing partner. When she attempted it she wrinkled her brow, thinking: "Why was I going to do a thing like that to Bob? To my first husband, I understand, but why on earth to Bob?"

Still mulling this over she removed the shade from the lamp with the pretext of putting it on at a better angle and the harsh light fell on both their faces. She was motionless for a short while as if posing for her portrait. A moth struck against the electric bulb with a slight tinkling sound. Her eyes were fixed on something above the head of the attorney whose face in the harsh light had the color of a sweet potato. Just to be doing something Arner picked up the negative and held it against the light. She

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seemed to wake up and started talking again about the fugitive madman:

"He climbed up that distant smokestack. Don't you see it? From here you can see it, way over there above the neon lights. And the firemen made him come down. Meanwhile the factory was paralyzed and then the workers demanded their wages and went on strike. That man caused great confusion in the city. And behind the photo, you see?"

Arner thought, surprised: "Yes, behind, the infinite night. On the other hand, Bob had it in front of him." He turned his chair sideways, facing the dance floor. Between Matilda and the girls around them he was becoming aware of subtle relationships. One of them also removed the lampshade, leaving the bulb uncovered. At the next table another did likewise. They all wanted to have the light in their faces.

Arner was puzzled. He wanted to dance again and the girl rose indolently. Always girls who go to dances rise indolently.

Arner asked Matilda why she didn't get a copy of the picture, and she said she preferred the negative with the body black and hair and eyes white. She continued talking and it was evident that the subject obsessed her:

"He is on the other side of the sanatorium, in the men's pavilion, on the fourth floor. He has only seen me once and from a distance. During the lunar days when I fall into the black well he knows, from far away, what's happening to me and in his pavilion he starts howling and moaning. They have to tie him up and put him in a padded cell, like they do me. Even so his screams are heard all over the sanatorium at night. The doctors don't understand. That's the bad thing about medicine. You doctors fix up everything with drugs, baths and injections, but you can't understand. About what happens to us women, you don't understand a thing. Pardon me for talking like this. I say so thinking of the doctors who work in the sanatorium."

All the table lamps were now shadeless. Supposing that the medical director was following them with his fishing bird's look,

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he avoided holding Matilda too close. And as they danced she was saying:

"The more I think about it the more convinced I am that maybe I could be the mother of that creature the planet needs. But it would be more difficult than you realize. With Bob, I mean, because Bob is far away. Always far away. Of course they do artificial insemination now but even so . . ."

At that moment her white shawl caught on the hard twigs of a boxwood sphere. One of those potted shrubs stood at each corner of the dance floor. They stopped to disentangle it and then began dancing again. Over Matilda's shoulder Arner could see the physician seated, smoking. He was exhaling the smoke in wide clouds that rose slowly above the terrace wall where they were torn apart and dissolved in the breeze. Arner asked Matilda, referring to the man on the smokestack:

"What did he do before coming to the sanatorium?"

"He was an engineer, I believe. A generating engineer," she replied tranquilly.

In the glare of the naked electric bulbs the patients' faces changed expression, according to the music. With the bolero they all became dreamy.

"Do you believe," she asked, "that the man on the smokestack could be the right father? To create the new being humanity is waiting for, I mean."

"Ah, that . . . one never knows. That is a mystery."

Arner fell silent and she said:

"Everything is a mystery. Bob knows how to make the nights elastic. I'm serious. Nights fifty and sixty hours long. And even longer. I understand this is hard for you to believe, but I can explain it, if you like."

The music stopped and they returned to their table.

"Do you want me to explain it to you?"

The electric bulbs had been covered with their shades again. Before Arner could answer Matilda, a nurse approached saying:

"You are wanted on the telephone."

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There were vases on some tables, and in each vase a flower. On the piano was another and very large vase, but empty. Matilda hated empty vases and was staring at that one, sometimes uncomfortably.

Arner answered the telephone. It was his wife asking him not to be late. Arner returned to the terrace and, his back to the street, leaned against the balustrade, for Mrs. Strolheim was not where he had left her. He thought of the explanations she had given him about the elasticity of the night, and then he started making new calculations regarding the beauty mask business. Again he wondered if the use of such masks would not in the end produce neuroses.

Matilda hastened to his side, speaking very animatedly:

"Don't run away, doctor. I was thinking about the contradictions on this terrace. Don't you agree? There are rugs as in a bedroom and wild storms too, I would say. But talk to me because a man dressed in black is looking my way, as if he wanted to come over. He must be a protestant minister and I don't like any kind of priests for dancing. They're too good and I'm afraid of them. I don't know how to talk to those men."

She had a piece of toast in one hand and her fine small teeth were making a crunching sound. A sound that habitually annoyed Arner because in it he heard something like the inner resonance of the skull. Such an allusion to the non-erotic anatomy of a woman was an offense to her. However, the crunching toast did not echo inside Matilda's skull and was not unpleasant.

She offered him the negative and once more Arner looked at it against the light and remarked that the man was handsome. Matilda smiled:

"He wrote me a love letter."

She took a folded paper out of her purse saying that she had made a copy to send to Bob, since she did not wish to keep secrets of any kind from him. In the end Bob had not divorced her. Arner said nothing and Matilda, seeing Miss Slingsby's chauffeur pass by, recalled his remarks to her as they were danc-

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ing. And she felt the need to talk: "You can poison a man, but that's not deceiving him, is it?" She said this hoping for Arner's reaction, but he was at a loss for words. Then Matilda gave him the letter where the man on the smokestack spoke to her about the "fountain mother," the "circle of origins," the "capital breath" and the "cordial breath." Matilda was the nucleus of the cosmic night. And she said to Arner:

"It's a strange language. How to answer him? I don't know how to write such things. You could answer him with your theory of the needs of the universe."

For a moment Arner thought that Matilda might be mocking him. The music stopped. A paper blown by the wind brushed against the strings of the violincello, making them vibrate. Arner saw Dr. Smith in the distance and suddenly decided to treat Matilda naturally and without any precaution whatsoever. As if she were a normal woman. Maybe she was.

"I knew your husband, Bob Strolheim," he told her. "We were good friends at college."

But she did not answer. Her silence again made Arner feel that he was in a false situation. A cement terrace on top of a hospital is always a little bit out of this world. He asked Matilda if she had actually been in love with either of her husbands.

"With Bob," she answered without hesitation.

And she added that she was going to explain how Bob, who was truly a genius, lengthened the night whenever he wished. First she told him the rather painful circumstances of her disagreement with her first husband. About her break with him. More than painful they were dramatic. Or tragic. That is to say, tragi-grotesque.

On a summer afternoon two years ago Bob had been waiting for her in a hotel bar. At the time he was trying out jet planes. Thanks to his fortune, and to a special authorization of the AAF, he had one of the latest models, which he kept in a private hangar. With that plane he could fly over one thousand miles an hour easily and this was the luxury of his life.

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Before being secluded in the sanatorium Matilda—she herself said so—was violent, eccentric and confused. Suddenly she would break off relations with a girl friend because, as she said, she had discovered that her friend had the feet of a dead person. Or that the expression on her friend's lips did not match that of her eyes when she smiled. She was married to her first husband and hated him, but she was faithful. Although she met Bob under equivocal circumstances, there was no adultery. The only liberty she ever took was to speak ill of her husband, but this was not so ominous because, as she said, adulterous wives do just the opposite. They speak well of their husbands to everybody, especially their lovers.

Among other extravagant things, Matilda told Bob that when her husband became tender he smelled of asphalt, and that he had a sense of prudence which she found intolerable.

That memorable night in the hotel bar Matilda arrived and said to Bob:

"Don't speak to me, Bob. Be still and wait till I'm more calm. Then I'll talk to you. Don't ask me anything."

Bob, the athletic and serious, almost taciturn, man, looked at her, thinking once more: "Nothing's wrong with her. Nerves. She hates her husband but doesn't divorce him. I wonder why she doesn't divorce him?"

Matilda, glancing at her sanatorium companions, was musing: "They all know I'm only periodically insane and that the rest of the time I'm well behaved. And they envy me, and they're right, because it's as if I lived in two different countries."

Again she remembered that night in the bar with Bob, while still married to her first husband. After a sip of cognac she had asked:

"Don't you notice anything strange about me, Bob?"

She took out her cigarette case, opened it, hesitated a moment, closed it again, evidently deciding not to smoke, and added:

"Don't look at me, for I'm going to say something barbar-

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ous. I believe I've killed him, my husband I mean. Don't say anything to me yet. Don't speak to me, please."

On the sanatorium terrace she reflected: "All these men who have come to the party have their past, too. Arner, among them. Mine is more distant, even though I am so young. It's more distant because they say I'm mad." Then she returned to the scene in the bar.

Bob stood up, left two bills on the table and said:

"Let's go somewhere else. Let's get out of here, but be calm."

It was useless advice because she was calm. Now also on the terrace of the sanatorium she was calm. She looked at the sky and thought of the infinite night.

They left the bar. Something odd was happening. Bob began telling himself that Matilda was quite capable of having killed her husband. "If so," it suddenly dawned on him, "I'm going to lose her before I've made her mine." This gave him a certain dejected feeling.

It was hot that night, but the air is dry and light in the nights of Cibola. They climbed into the car and by the avenue running parallel to the river they drove down to a little desert. On the sanatorium terrace Matilda recalled that this night, which later became elastic, was for the moment very rigid. That's the way it seemed to her, at least.

She said to Bob:

"I've killed him, but when the police find out I won't be alive. I am determined to kill myself before morning."

She opened her purse and showed him the revolver with a very short barrel and a very wide breech. The cartridges were intact. Incredulous Bob asked:

"Your husband . . . is he dead?"—She nodded.—"And you say you killed him? But how did you kill him?"

Matilda said that her husband took two pills before going to bed every day. That night instead of those he ordinarily took, she had put two others on the table, from a bottle marked with

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a double poison sign. The pills looked the same and he took them. They were not pills, however, but capsules. Matilda justified herself in a shocking manner:

"I swear to you that I could stand no more, Bob. I looked at my husband and felt the roots of my hair turn cold. When I returned home at night he would say to me, smiling in a horrible way: 'Did you have fun, Matty?' He never said Matilda but Matty, which does not suit me because that's the nickname for Martha. When he wanted to feel protecting he caressed me with his open hand, patting me on the back the way he would a dog. And sometimes he moved his left ear like a cat. But he was not a cat or a dog either. He belonged to another species, to one of those species they call extinguished. Or extinct. Don't they say extinct?"

Bob nodded uncomprehending and she went on:

"Besides he had secret vices. He never drank anything but boiled water. Do you believe that a man who never drinks anything but boiled water can be honest? A type like that is hiding some moral deformity, that's what I say. In short, whatever happened, it's done now and can't be helped. I know that if they catch me I am lost, but they won't catch me. And in any case, I don't care. Don't you believe I've lived long enough?"

"How long?"

"Twenty-one years."

That had been the most dramatic night in Matilda's life. And she remembered it as she watched Dr. Smith, who also resembled those examples of extinct species, walking around the terrace. The orchestra was playing softly and Matilda returned to the unforgettable night without the slightest sensation of guilt. She put the revolver back in her purse and said to Bob: "If you had a memory you would recall what we talked about one day. We were talking about my husband and you asked: 'Why don't you divorce him?' What did I answer? Do you remember what I answered?"

Bob was looking for a place with a public telephone. When

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he found it he stopped the car, got out and called Matilda's home. After the second ring the husband answered. His voice revealed nothing beyond the indolence of a man who has taken the trouble to drop his newspaper to answer the telephone. Twice he repeated: "Who is it?" Bob, holding his breath, slowly hung up the receiver without saying a word and returned to the car, filled with doubts. He repeated what had happened. She asked:

"A man's voice?"—Bob nodded. "It must have been the police. Or some neighbor. That means they already know. When he felt bad he must have gone to the stairs calling for help."

The car was racing along a broad avenue where blue and violet fluorescent lights had recently been installed.

"Where are we going?" she asked.

"To my house."

"No, not to your house, Bob. You know that."

Matilda's moral sense was indeed original. She could poison a husband but go to Bob's bachelor apartment, that she could not do.

Recalling all this, Matilda paid attention to the silence on the terrace, a silence fraught with nerves. "If I screamed," she thought, "all the women would scream."

In her memories she returned to the spot in the city suburbs where she had been with Bob. The river ran close by and on that side the bank was over fifty feet high. The moon was full. "That's the difference," said Matilda. "Now I can look at the moon. When I have committed suicide and am dead, the moon will look at me."

After a slight pause she suddenly exclaimed:

"I am not to blame for everything that happened."

"Then who is?"

"My husband."

"Why?"

"Because he told me one or two weeks ago that those tablets caused almost instant death."

"Let's get this straight. Were they pills, capsules or tablets?"

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"You're right. Tablets. Anyway, it's too late now, and this must be the last night of my life. You know me and you also know that I am not saying this just to be talking. There's only one thing I would like: for this night to last a little longer than the others, since it is the last one in my life. I can't bear the idea of the sun's coming up in a few hours. I don't want to see it. I don't want to be alive when the daylight appears. Have you noticed how ugly people are in the sunlight? Their wide foolish faces, with hairs in their noses. By daylight the streets, houses, cities, too, are ugly. Everywhere there are a thousand horrible little things: dead men in elevators. Dead and standing. Strange things that walk on all fours and bark. And a lot of poverty with a clean shirt. And a lot of hatred."

"Also a little love, Matilda. Also a great deal of love, I would say."

"Everything is dusty and dry and dirty. Or too bright. Haven't you noticed? Little trivial things to make you laugh and suffer at the same time. Haven't you seen those streets with rubber patches on the sidewalk? And people recently shaved with sleep-swollen faces? Haven't you noticed that people are uglier in the summertime than in winter? They all have too fat ankles and pimply noses. I'll be gone before daylight. I don't want to see those things again. But I would like for the night to be longer, I wish this night would last for two or three days, because I am rather cowardly and afraid of suicide. No more afraid than anybody else. Anyway, I will do it."

With the drowsy tone he was wont to use for important revelations, Bob said:

"Listen, Matilda, I can make this night last as long as you wish. Six hours? A hundred? How long do you want me to stretch out the night for you and put off the hour of dawn, dear?"

"This is no time for joking, Bob."

She was far from imagining, she told herself there on the terrace, that Bob was serious. She recalled that they crossed over

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a rather high bridge, and that on one side there was a sign which read: "Throwing objects into the river prohibited."

That night long ago Bob had the sudden idea that Matilda could be right, and that in spite of everything her husband was dead. The man who answered the telephone must have been a policeman or neighbor.

"To those who are about to die," he said solemnly, "you give whatever they wish. I can give it to you, my darling. I mean it. How many hours do you want me to add to the night?"

Bob accelerated as if in a hurry to arrive somewhere and on passing a drug store he stopped, saying that he wanted to buy something. But again he went to the telephone and called Matilda's home. This time nobody answered and he was really frightened.

Nevertheless as he took the wheel again he muttered:

"Listen, darling. And if there were no crime?"

"How many times do I have to tell you? If he isn't dead yet, he will die. That doesn't keep me," she added hastily, "from being an honest woman. I have never offended my husband. To kill a man is not to offend him, is it?"

Then she repeated that she would commit suicide that very night. Bob looked up at the sky:

"Don't worry," he said, "there's no sign of dawn yet."

They went to the airport, which she always insisted on calling air course instead of airport. Everybody there knew Bob. He signed some papers in an office with a strange swiftness and without paying any attention to Matilda. Then a passport, which he took from a leather jacket kept in a cupboard, was duly stamped and signed.

When he appeared to have forgotten Matilda, he put his arm around her and led her to a kind of wardrobe beside the hangars. There he had her put on an uncomfortable, coarse jacket. Soon they were installed in the plane which took off. "This is something I hadn't counted on," Matilda commented.

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Bob reminded her that it was not the first time she had flown with him. "That isn't what I meant," she admonished.

The airplane rose. Immediately they were flying above the clouds which they could see underneath illumined by the moon. She said: "Maybe my husband is dead and his ghost is wandering around up here." Bob, in a less lugubrious mood, repeated:

"The night will be as long as you wish."

Underneath them the earth was a confused mass, the cities looked like small handfuls of yellow, white, and green lights.

They reached San Francisco before midnight. It was still eleven o'clock there. The mechanics refueled the plane. Matilda was excited by the adventure and Bob asked her:

"Do you want to rest?"

He was referring to the rest rooms. She said no and they returned to the plane. Matilda remarked: "I've heard there are Chinese in San Francisco, but I don't see any."

Again they were airborne, over the sea.

"I don't know what all this is for," she remarked.

"Yes, you do," he said. "Now we're on our way to Honolulu."

They were flying very high and Bob had her put on a mask connected to a tank of compressed oxygen. The taciturn Bob then initiated one of those monosyllabic dialogues which were his specialty.

"All right?"

"Yes."

"Dizzy?"

"No."

"Your ears?"

"All right."

"What are you thinking of?"

"Nothing."

"Really nothing?"

"Really, why?"

Bob sighed:

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"No matter. I'm thinking for both of us."

They reached Honolulu in less than three hours and as they climbed out of the plane Bob again asked Matilda: "Do you want to rest?"

"No," she answered, slightly impatient.

In Honolulu it was not yet midnight. "Here," Matilda noted, "are dark-skinned women with low buttocks who wiggle their hips when they dance, but I don't see any." Her remark about the low buttocks made Bob laugh.

In Honolulu Matilda had the impression that the night had begun to expand like the cupola of an immense umbrella. It was six o'clock by her watch, with still no sign of dawn.

They ate a light supper at the airport bar before returning to the plane. Matilda drank only a sip of mineral water. She drank nothing alcoholic because she wanted to be wide awake and alert when the final instant arrived. That's what she said.

The next stop was in the Marshall Islands. It was terribly hot and they shed so much clothing they were almost nude. Seeing her awake, fresh and vigorous, and without fatigue or drowsiness, Bob decided that she owed half her beauty to her excellent health. The healthiness of a precious animal. Bob felt highly stimulated and filled with hope. She repeated: "It's obscenely hot." This expression, which she had learned from a waitress in the bar, appealed to her.

They reached Luzon in the Philippines. People dressed neatly in white and, according to Matilda, had turtle eyes. They all seemed affable and polite, but Matilda thought that they stared at her too hard.

Then Calcutta, in India. Here they had difficulties because the police asked for Matilda's passport which, naturally, she did not have. Uncomfortably she said: "What are these people looking for?" Bob whispered in her ear: "Maybe they suspect you."

"But why? Whatever I've done in my own country is my affair and is nobody's business, much less theirs with their absurd

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laws. They are laws for coolies who speak with an Oxford accent. That's incongruent."

It was still midnight. By Matilda's watch it was three in the afternoon and yet it was midnight, just as in the Philippines.

They flew to Karachi and then on to Cairo. In Karachi Matilda saw Americans dressed in shorts like the English wear. Matilda observed: "In this country they used to cremate the widow along with the body of her husband." In her remark about cremation a great respect for the country was apparent. Back in the plane Bob returned—he seemed to be sleepy—to his short-phrased dialogues:

"Shall we wait for the dawn here?" he asked. "Or do you still mean to kill yourself?"

"Yes. Before sun-up."

"All right. Then the sun will never come up."

"And who are you to keep the sun from rising?" she asked, offended.

Bob turned his head, burst out laughing—just a little chortle—and kissed her. Then he became taciturn again.

When they reached Cairo it was twelve five. The night was broad and stretchable, still. They had been flying for thirteen hours and always it was midnight. The dawn did not appear. Bob's airplane pulled the night and spread it over the planet. In Cairo the police also questioned Matilda. She refused to answer without the presence of her lawyer. Or so she said. They left her alone on realizing that the plane was about to take off for the Sahara. Matilda continued as fresh as a rose of Alexandria, a city over which they flew.

In Tunis only Bob left the plane, because Matilda was sleepy and distrusted the Arabs who, according to her, were treacherous and sanguinary. She called them "Tuaregs," acting as if she knew everything there was to be known on the subject. Bob gave Matilda a long kiss, but she pushed him away saying she had the impression that her husband was peering through the windows in the cabin roof and making remarks.

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"What?"

"Practical things. The names of the hotels and their prices. The exchange rate of money and the maximum and minimum temperature."

"How strange in a dead man!"

"That's what husbands usually say, dead or alive."

When they reached Lisbon it was only twelve forty by the airport clock. Matilda liked what she saw from there and wanted to go into the city, but Bob refused. "If we go," he said, "the dawn will trap you there, the light of day, I mean, and you know what will happen." But just in case he asked:

"Or have you changed your mind?"

"About suicide? No."

They flew to the Azores, and from there to Bermuda and St. Louis, and finally Cibola again. Always it was night. There they were in the city where Matilda believed she had killed her husband. Flexing his numb legs, Bob declared:

"What do you think of that? We've been flying for twenty-four hours now without ever seeing daylight."

He started giving instructions for continuing the flight and said to Matilda:

"We'll continue on to Seattle and from there we'll go to Japan in a direct flight. I can keep on giving you an elastic night, an interminable night. But don't you want to rest?"

She said yes and went to the rest room. When she returned she expressed a rather unexpected desire. Timidly she said that she would like to go to her house for a moment, in other words, to the scene of the crime.

Bob looked for a telephone and called her husband for the third time. The "dead" man answered immediately. Bob announced their call—of the two of them—and the husband seemed surprised but not displeased. His tone was affable.

When they reached Matilda's house her husband was wearing pajamas and grey bathrobe with a green print and his hair was tousled. Matilda looked at him, absolutely nonplussed, and

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the husband began mixing highballs:

"I was worried," he said with a natural calm, "because Matty took the revolver, but I see that everything has gone well, fortunately."

She opened her purse and there was a moment of stupefaction in both men when they saw her with the revolver in her hand. But Bob took the gun and handed it to the husband who, gesticulating with it, said to his wife:

"May I ask where you have been, my dear?"

"We have made a trip around the world," she said with an innocent expression.

"You see?" commented the husband, addressing Bob.

Bob thought he detected a whiff of asphalt. He confirmed Matilda's words, stating that they had just flown around the planet. The husband looked at both of them with a perturbed expression.

"Well, in any case you know, my dear, that I can give you a divorce whenever you wish," he said, more affable than ever.

While he was speaking Bob thought he saw his left ear move. The three of them were standing and laughing foolishly. The husband added several amiable and vague phrases, which Bob answered in the same tone, and shortly afterward Matilda said that she was ready to leave and went out leading Bob by the hand.

In a few minutes they were at the bar. They sat down at their usual table, almost in the dark. "I'm worried," she remarked. "It must not be easy to divorce a dead man."

"But your husband is alive!"

"Ah," she said, "that's what you think."

Bob felt sure that the poisoning had been a trick of the husband. He had wanted to try out Matilda and see how far her dangerousness would go. He put two harmless tablets in the cyanide tube and warned his wife to be careful with them, as they would cause instant death. A trick of daring prudence indeed. It turned out all right, that is to say, badly.

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Bob took Matilda's hand and asked her:

"Will you come to my house, now?"

Before replying Matilda remembered the tablets. She did not answer. Bob was meditating, stirring his whiskey with a swizzle stick.

On the sanatorium terrace Matilda was dancing again with Arner, unable to recall anything more. There it all ended. That is to say, she vaguely supposed that she had married Bob, and then he became ill, and scandalous and unpleasant things happened to her. The only thing she knew for certain was that Bob was not coming to see her at the sanatorium, although he sent her flowers and books from New York, Florida, Bermuda, and even from Paris. The flowers from Paris seemed to bring with them some kind of intelligent roguishness.

The music on the terrace stopped and they returned to their table. Matilda glanced up at the sky frequently and a neighbor came up to her and said:

"The plane will not come."

"What plane?" she asked a little frightened.

Arner smiled and also looked at the sky. The night was turning cold and some of the patients were retiring, accompanied by nurses. Matilda's paper napkin slipped off her lap and Arner bent over to pick it up. In the spaces between the rugs the floor of red stone slabs looked hardened and meteorized. They stood up and went over to the balustrade nearest the orchestra.

They saw a woman enter the terrace with uncertain steps, walk over to a table, take a glass of orangeade and leave again, after bowing slightly to Matilda. Matilda explained:

"The poor dear's on the fourth floor. Did you notice how she walks? Sideways. She was born that way, they say. Like that, diagonally. One might say she lives a diagonal life."

Matilda began talking about Bob who still loved her, she said, in spite of their separation. Arner felt that it must be easy to love this woman. Again she asked:

"Now do you understand about the infinite night?"

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"Yes."

"You believed it was madness. I thought that everything about the exceptional man who can redeem the universe was madness, too, and nevertheless I realize that it is possible. Isn't it?"

"Yes, of course."

"And I am the potential mother. Isn't that what you call it?"

Arner gazed at the television antenna on the roof, in the form of an S. It looked like Miss Slingsby's initial.

Again the orchestra was playing and several couples were dancing. Near the entrance the sanatorium director and several nurses were examining a small notebook.

"Dr. Smith must be talking about my lunar calendar," Matilda commented, smiling. "Maybe the black days are approaching. Know something? Just before each crisis I can feel my own skeleton vibrating like the wires on telephone poles. Haven't you heard those wires vibrating out in the country on windy days?"

No sooner had Matilda said this than she began imitating the humming of the telephone lines. Then the humming increased until it became a sad lowing. A great and sorrowful lowing. An immense, desolate and muffled bellowing, like that of a calving cow.

Two nurses came running with Dr. Smith to lead Matilda away, but without violence, as if she were a delicate child. She turned to glance back at the attorney who was also feeling—he acknowledged later—his own bare skeleton, dry and vibrating.

On the terrace the dancing continued.

(*Translated from the Spanish by Florence Sender*)

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Louis Auchincloss

PROUST'S PICTURE OF SOCIETY

Gore Vidal once told me that in reading Proust he was put off by a nagging sense that the narrator was a juggler with three balls in the air, busily engaged in the triple misrepresentation that he was not a homosexual, not a social climber and not a Jew. Of course, one can answer that Proust, as a novelist, was under no obligation to endow any character, even the "I" who tells his story, with his own characteristics, but he deliberately invites the identification by giving the narrator his own first name. And when we consider George Painter's exhaustive researches (*Proust*: *The Early Years*) to prove that every character, every episode, even every landscape, has a corresponding model or models drawn from the author's own experience, when we consider further how little point there would be in writing so many volumes to recapture a purely invented past, we must conclude that the whole work, if not, strictly speaking, an autobiography, is at least bathed in a more intimately subjective light than other novels. It seems to me a consequence that to read the book against the background of the author's known predilections and prejudices becomes something more than the usual academic game of scholarship. It becomes a process that brings the picture into clearer focus.

To take up the first of the misrepresentations, it is now, of course, so notorious that Proust was homosexual that the number of his readers who are ignorant of the fact must be relatively small. Certainly, anyone trying to read the story of Marcel as that of a sexually normal male will be faced with some baffling

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questions. Why, for example, does Marcel only fall in love with Albertine when Doctor Cottard points out to him that, while dancing with another girl, she is rubbing her breasts against those of her partner? And why does Marcel's mother, who is otherwise represented as a woman of the strictest Victorian morality, tolerate the presence of Albertine in her apartment at night? Why is almost every male character in the book, other than the narrator, an actual or reputed homosexual? A perspicacious reader, who knew nothing of Proust's personal life, would probably recognize in the author (as the author recognizes in Charlus) the tendency of the homosexual to attribute his tastes to others. But what of the other two misrepresentations? Would the same perspicacious reader become aware that the author was half Jewish and a man who had spent much of his life assiduously cultivating a titled, anti-semitic aristocracy? It seems less likely.

What difference does it make? Not much, surely, in an appreciation of the work as a whole. But it seems to me that there are certain exaggerations in Proust's picture of the social world that stem directly from his confusion of his snobbishness with his love of history and art, and that an analysis of these exaggerations may be of assistance to the reader who, like myself, has speculated about them.

I note at the outset that the characters of *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* are constantly referring to Saint-Simon. Marcel's grandfather is as familiar with everything concerning the bourgeoisie of Combray as was Saint-Simon's Prince de Conti with the family tree of the court. Swann, in the torments of his jealousy, emigrates to "those few and distant parts of himself which had remained almost foreign to his love and to his pain," by reading about court life in Saint-Simon. In his first appearance in the novel he refers to Saint-Simon's volume on the mission to Spain. The relationship of Léonie and her maid, Françoise, is described as a counterpart to the relationship between king and courtiers at Versailles, and the perfect manners,

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the ceremoniousness, the ignorance and the heartlessness of the Duc de Guermantes is contrasted with Saint-Simon's portrait of Louis XIV. Indeed, the Duc occupies in the novel the same position at the apex of society that the sun king does in the memoirs. Even Albertine loves talking to Marcel about Saint-Simon. But the character, of course, who revels most in the many volumes of the prolific duke is the Baron de Charlus. He is the successor of those great gentlemen in the memoirs who associate with their lackeys because no one else is good enough for them. As an expert in his own genealogy and as a zealous watcher of any usurped privilege, he excels Saint-Simon himself, for he claims precedence for the Guermantes over the House of France. He brings the past into constant, immediate relation with himself ("There are portraits of my uncles, the King of Poland and the King of England, by Mignard") and amuses himself at parties by creating a sort of tableau-vivant out of the memoirs. We see him at Madame Verdurin's, refusing to rise from his chair when his hostess comes over to speak to him, impersonating in his fancy the Maréchal d'Uxelles who was so proud as to remain seated, under a pretence of laziness, before the most distinguished persons at court. It is a game which I suspect that the author himself may have enjoyed playing at Robert de Montesquiou's or at Comtesse Greffuhle's. And when, at the end of *Le Temps Retrouvé,* Marcel describes the great literary work which he hopes he may be spared long enough to undertake, which is, of course, no other than the one which the reader is then completing, he feels it necessary to state that he has no intention of reproducing the memoirs of Saint-Simon.

Nor is it my intent to imply that he was. That he might have done so, had he chosen, is demonstrated by the brilliant parody of Saint-Simon in *Pastiches et Melanges,* where he mixes characters from the court of Versailles with his own acquaintances. I do maintain, however, that he dignified and excused his own snobbishness by identifying it with the snobbishness of Saint-Simon and by consciously adopting the role of court historian

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to a latter-day Versailles. It was a habit of mind and attitude that distorted his over-all picture of society in three respects.

In the first place, his society characters have a hardness, a rudeness and a maliciousness that is more in keeping with a crowded, jealous court than with life in a large city. When Madame de Gallardon speaks to her cousin, Oriane, about Swann, whom she knows to be the latter's dearest friend, she says: "People do say about your M. Swann that he's the sort of man one can't have in the house, is that true?" The author explains this ill-tempered outburst to a woman whose favor the speaker is anxious to cultivate by describing the latter as one of those persons who could never restrain her highest social ambitions "to the immediate and secret satisfaction of saying something disagreeable." Now this is all very well, and one has known plenty of Mesdames de Gallardon, but my trouble comes from the fact that *nobody* in Proust seems to be able to resist the temptation to say something disagreeable. The air is more the arrogant air of Versailles than that of Paris within the memory of many still living. When the Baron de Charlus's friends come to Madame Verdurin's to hear Morel, their offensiveness is hard to credit. Typical of the comments, Proust tells us, of each duchess within the hearing of their hostess are: "Show me, which is mother Verdurin; do you think I really need speak to her? I do hope, at least, that she won't put my name in the paper tomorrow, nobody would ever speak to me again. What! That woman with the white hair, but she looks quite presentable," or "Tell me, has there *ever* been a Monsieur Verdurin?" Poor Odette, in her helpless old age, is treated even worse:

> One constantly heard people say: 'I don't know if Madame de Forcheville recognizes me, perhaps I ought to be introduced over again.' 'You can dispense with that' (someone replied at the top of his voice, neither knowing nor caring that Gilberte's mother could hear every word), 'you won't get any fun out of it. She's a bit daft.'

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The characters behave with a heartlessness about illness and death that recalls Saint-Simon's passages on the deaths of Louis XIV's heirs. The Duc de Guermantes refuses to be told of the death of a cousin because he would have to give up a ball; his wife at the same time affects not to credit Swann's news of his own impending demise, and Madame Verdurin, confronted inescapably with the death of her friend, Princess Sherbatoff, pretends always to have disliked her rather than put on a mourning air that might dampen her party. The Verdurins, indeed, have no mercy even on physical disabilities, as is shown by their treatment of Saniette:

'What's that he says?' shouted Monsieur Verdurin with an air of disgust and fury combined, knitting his brows as though it was all he could do to grasp something unintelligible. 'It is impossible to understand what you say, what have you got in your mouth?' he inquired, growing more and more furious, and alluding to Saniette's defective speech. 'Poor Saniette, I won't have him made unhappy,' said Madame Verdurin in a tone of false pity, so as to leave no one in doubt as to her husband's insolent attention.

It may be argued that Madame Verdurin is not in society at the time, but later she becomes Princesse de Guermantes. One doubts if she had to improve her manners to suit her new position. For hear Monsieur de Charlus, speaking at the Prince de Guermantes' of Madame de Saint-Euverte, whom he knows to be listening:

What would prevent me from questioning her about those passionate times is the acuteness of my olfactory organ. I say to myself all at once: "Oh, good Lord, someone has broken the lid of my cesspool," which is simply the marquise opening her mouth to emit some invitation. They tell me the indefatigable old street walker gives 'garden parties.' I should describe them as invitations to explore the sewers. Are you going to wallow there?

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Conceding that Charlus is a bit insane, would not his interlocutor try to silence him, especially as she knows that poor Madame de Saint-Euverte is overhearing all? And would Madame de Saint-Euverte really fawn on the Baron after the humiliation of hearing herself described as a cesspool?

In the second place, I think it questionable if people in society in Proust's day thought and talked quite so obsessively about their social position. The members of the Guermantes family hold forth with amazing pedantry about their own genealogy. At Marcel's first dinner at the Duchesse de Guermantes' the company (though I admit to the Duchesse's disgust) turns happily from gossip to settle down for the major part of the evening to the serious business of pedigree. It is pedigree, too, at its heaviest: "Not in that way at all, she belonged to the branch of the Ducs de la Rochefoucauld, my grandmother came from the Ducs de Doudeauville," but Marcel, like his creator, is entranced and cannot even respond to the questions of the Turkish ambassadress for fear of missing any of the genealogies. To him, a great name keeps in the full light of day the men and women who bear it; one follows the course of their families, through diaries and correspondence, back to the Middle Ages to recapture a past in which "impenetrable night" would cloak the origins of middle-class folk. But his aesthetic pleasure is even greater than his historical:

> The Prince d'Agrigente himself, as soon as I heard that his mother had been a Damas, a granddaughter of the Duke of Modena, was delivered, as from an unstable chemical alloy, from the face and speech that prevented one from recognizing him, and went to form with Damas and Modena, which themselves were only titles, a combination infinitely more seductive. Each name displaced by the attractions of another, with which I had never suspected it of having any affinity, left the unalterable position which it had occupied in my brain, where familiarity had dulled it, and speeding to join the Mortemarts, the Stuarts or the

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Bourbons, traced with them branches of the most graceful design and an everchanging color.

Relating a title to the past is simply projecting snobbishness back into history. Proust was as impressed by a dead duke as by a live one. His characters have streams of consciousness that ceaselessly gurgle over the damp pebbles of rank. The young Madame de Cambremer has married her husband in order to be able to refer to her mother-in-law's brother by the family abbreviation: "Mon oncle de Ch'nouville." Madame de Villeparisis speaks with affected amusement but basic veneration of the convent where her great-aunts were abbesses, which excluded the daughters of the King of France because they were descended from the Medici. Her nephew, the Prince de Guermantes, makes a scene at every dinner party when he is not given the seat to which he would have been entitled under Louis XIV. And Charlus, of course, excels them all, speaking of his relatives who are described in Saint-Simon's memoirs as if they were contemporaries: "We took precedence over all foreign princes. The Duc de Bourgogne, having come to us with ushers with raised wands, we obtained the King's authority to have them lowered." Yet in contrast to the Courvoisiers, a related but rival clan, the Guermantes have a reputation of modernity and liberalness! The latter, whom we meet only fleetingly, are the family who are supposed to be the *real* conservatives in questions of precedence and pedigree. I am aware that there were, and still are, persons as obsessed with these questions as Charlus himself, but to postulate a whole society of them seems to approach the field of caricature.

And, finally, Proust's picture of the society of the Faubourg St. Germain is too lush, too rich. No matter how painstakingly he underlines the dullness, the selfishness, and the fatuity of the Guermantes set, they remain to the end still invested with much of the glamor in which his imagination has clothed them. The beauty of their women, the romance of

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their titles and palaces, the splendor of their pedigrees give them a fairy tale quality which may be intentionally contrasted with the banality of their conversation and lives, but which nonetheless lingers in the reader's mind as an attribute somehow earned and merited by society people. It is illuminating in this respect to read a fatuous little volume by Princess Marthe Bibesco entitled "La Duchesse de Guermantes." In Proust's portrait of Oriane she recognizes the blonde beauty, the ancient lineage and the high style of her friend, Laure de Chevigné, and she relates an anecdote about the latter that might indeed have been taken from *Du Coté de Chez Guermantes.* Madame de Chevigné, greeting her old friend, the Grand Duchess Wladimir of Russia, treats her with a combination of old court courtesy and near impertinence that recalls the relationship between the Duchesse de Guermantes and the Princess de Parme. Taking in the Grand Duchess's hat and dress in a sweeping glance, she exclaims: "Possible, in St. Petersburg, or the Hague, or Copenhagen. *Impossible* in Paris. I take the liberty of escorting Madame to the Rue de la Paix, to Paquin's or to Worth's. Yes, now, immediately, at this moment! Gustave! Call Her Imperial Highness's carriage!" This, admittedly, is pure Oriane, but Princess Bibesco has not a word to say about the insipidity, the selfishness or the vanity of the character with whom she is so proud to identify her old and valued friend. Yet it is not possible (however tempting to suppose) that a woman who has written three books on Proust should have failed to finish his novel. Her attitude is simply further evidence of how much of Proust's adoration of the aristocratic way of life seeps through the meshes of his analytical net.

I have been careful to set down these criticisms of Proust's picture of society because I wish to clear the way for a final judgment of undiluted praise. For never, to my knowledge, in fiction or outside of it, has there been so brilliant or so com-

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prehensive a study of the social world. In fact, it stands so above its nearest competitors as to seem in retrospect almost the only picture of society in all of literature. Most people who write about society, whether they be novelists or sociologists or simply gossip columnists, make the basic error of assuming that there must be some consistency in its standards. They take for granted that there are rules which govern the qualifications of those seeking admission, that if one has been gently born or if one can play polo or excel at cards or if one has the gift of pleasing or is a good shot or a good conversationalist, one may tap with confidence at any closed gates. When the rules are seen not to apply, the observer concludes that they once did, but have since broken down. As the cases of non-application multiply, he is apt to shrug in frustration and say: "Oh, well, nowadays, it's only a question of money!"

What Proust alone had the patience to piece out is that any society will apply all known standards together or individually, or in any combination needed to include a maverick who happens to please or to exclude an otherwise acceptable person who happens not to. Nor are society people conscious of the least inconsistency in acting so. They keep no records, and they have no written constitution. Why should their rules be defined in any way other than by a list of exceptions to them? Proust understood this with the clarity of one who had succeeded in being accepted. There is a delightful passage in which he describes how the Baron de Charlus never hesitates to reverse himself. If a nobleman with whom he has quarreled happens to come of an ancient family possessed of a recent dukedom, the precedence of the dukedom becomes everything, the family nothing. "The Montesquiou are descended from an old family?" he snorts. "What would that prove, supposing that it were proved? They have descended so far that they have reached the fourteenth storey below stairs." If, on the contrary, he has quarreled with a gentleman possessed of an ancient dukedom, but to whom this distinction has come without any length

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of pedigree, the case is altered, pedigree alone counts. He says of the Duc de Luynes: "I ask you;—M. Alberti, who does not emerge from the mire until Louis XIII. What can it matter to us that favoritism at court allowed them to pick up dukedoms to which they have no right?" Small wonder that Madame Verdurin could not fathom the standards by which he selected her guests for Morel's recital.

Only by conceding the arbitrariness of those on top and by intuitively sensing the bonds of congeniality that hold them together can the observer hope to appreciate the different gradations in position. He must also be prepared for the bad memory of society and its habit of judging its own history by the same erroneous standards of its most misguided student. Take, in *Du Coté de Chez Guermantes,* the contrasted positions of Madame Leroi and the Marquise de Villeparisis. Madame Leroi, the daughter of "rich timber people," has learned to copy exactly the colors of the Guermantes and the Courvoisiers and has penetrated so far into the inner citadel that only a knowledgeable minority is even aware of her existence. Madame de Villeparisis, on the other hand, though a member of the Guermantes family and once treated "like a daughter" by Queen Marie Amélie, has fallen from the first rank because of the irregularity of her life. Her parties seem smart enough to the uninitiated, because her family still attend them, as do many famous artists and men of letters, and because the talk is good. Madame de Villeparisis knows how to make her lions roar, while Madame Leroi, in the tradition of the truly fashionable, seats them at the card table. But it nevertheless remains the sad law of the social world that Madame de Villeparisis would gladly leave her lions to roar alone for the opportunity of sitting at the least of those card tables. Only after the death of both women will their fortunes be reversed. Posterity will judge Madame de Villeparisis a great social leader, because of the glittering names strewn through the pages of her memoirs, memoirs that Madame Leroi would never have stooped to

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write. The children of people who snubbed her will freely accord Madame de Villeparisis in history the social position that she wanted in life. They will never have heard of Madame Leroi.

The rapidly fluctuating nature of society makes it a perfect theme in a book about time. There is no stain so deep that a little time will not wash it out, no position so assured that a little time will not erode it. Marcel's favorite duchess may be "the eighteenth Oriane de Guermantes in succession, without a single mésalliance," but her reputation at the end is that of a declassée who hobnobs with actresses, while the niece of Jupien, the tailor, adopted by Charlus, becomes first Mlle. d'Oleron and later Marquise de Cambremer. Would anyone anticipate that Odette, a prostitute married to a friend of the Prince of Wales and the Comte de Paris, would have to await the death of her husband to be accepted by the smart set which dropped him for marrying her? Who but Proust would explain that the Baron de Charlus's reputation for homosexuality in Madame Verdurin's circle, however abundantly merited by his private life, is still undeserved because they have confused him with another Monsieur de Charlus, whose wide reputation for the same vice is unfounded? Or that Swann, who disdained to boast to Marcel's family of his brilliant position at the very summit of society, should in later years become noticeably vulgar in dropping the names of minor bureaucrats whom he has induced to call on his wife? Or that Madame Verdurin who turns all her hatred on Swann for refusing to join in her denunciation of the Duchesse de la Tremouille, whom she does not even know, should later occupy, as Princesse de Guermantes, the first position in the world she has once affected to despise? Society is not aware of changing its standards, for it has no memory except for its own acts of condemnation, and for these only so far as the individual condemned is concerned. Swann can never be forgiven for marrying Odette, but his daughter, who was not even born in wedlock, can become a

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Guermantes. Society is violently contrary; it hates to be wooed and fears to be despised. Marcel can be invited to the Guermantes only when he has ceased to care about being invited. Society is kinder and less critical than he has expected, but only with its darlings: society is harder than he has expected, but only with those who fail to conceal their yearning to enter it, although it is to just this yearning that society owes what glamor and reputation it has. One of the reasons that *A la Recherche* is so long a book is that inconsistency, if described at all, must be described in detail.

Most novels that deal with society take on some of the meretricious gaudiness that it is their avowed purpose to deplore. Their authors become guilty of the snobbishness and triviality of which they accuse their characters. Octave Feuillet and Ouida may shake their heads over the empty vanity of the great world, but they revel in describing it. Proust comes closest to escaping the contamination of his subject matter because he does not set society apart from the rest of mankind. To him the differences between class and class are superficial. Snobbishness reigns on all levels, so why does it matter which level one selects to study? Why not, indeed, pick the highest level, particularly if one's own snobbishness is thus gratified? Society in Proust parades before us, having to represent not a segment of mankind, but something closer to mankind itself. It is the very boldness of Proust's assumption that his universe is *the* universe, like the boldness of his assumption that all love is jealousy and all men homosexuals, that gives to his distorted picture a certain universal validity. It is his faith that a sufficiently careful study of each part will reveal the whole, that the analysis of a dinner party can be as illuminating as the analysis of a war. It is his glory that he very nearly convinces us.

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R. H. S. Crossman

SOCIALISM AND THE COLD WAR

The most important decision we have to take is which role the Labour Party shall play in the three or four years before the next election—a Fighting Opposition or the Alternative Government? Of course, the roles are not completely exclusive. Both the "Shadow Cabinet" and the National Executive consist of a mixture of right-wing administrators, who feel themselves at home as members of an alternative Government, and left-wing crusaders, who want to lead a fighting Opposition. During the three years before the general election, it was the right-wingers who mainly had their way in rethinking Socialist policy, in formulating the election program and, most important of all, in creating the new image of the Labour Party in the press, and on radio and television. Under the personal leadership and with the personal inspiration of Mr. Gaitskell, the image of a crusading Socialist Opposition was suppressed and the Labour Party presented itself as a humane, decent and business-like alternative to the Tories. Since the election the Revisionists have argued that the concessions made for the sake of unity to the traditional Left proved fatally expensive and that the only way of wooing the modern electorate is to remove the last traces of "leftism" and present the Labour Party quite uncompromisingly as an alternative board of management for the Affluent Society. These Revisionist demands have provoked an equal and opposite campaign, insisting that the Labour Party should break with the Establishment and present itself as a fighting Opposition. Now there is a real danger that the net result of this conflict will be a flabby compromise, irrelevant to the problems with which the Government, Tory or Labour, will have to cope in the next decade.

How, then, can unity of purpose be re-established? The truth is that there is no principle by recourse to which the eternal conflict

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between right-wingers and left-wingers, between administrators and crusaders, between professional ex-Ministers and professional Oppositionists can be settled in the abstract. The only rational way to settle it is to examine the kind of problems we shall face in the 1960's and to ask ourselves what kind of Labour Party will be capable of dealing with them.

I believe that, in posing the problem in this way, I shall win cordial assent from Mr. Crosland, Mr. Jay and Mr. Jenkins. Their proposals for changing the image of the Labour Party and eradicating many of its radical traits are all based on certain assumptions about the nature of the post-war world and the prospects of the British economy in the next decade. Both in his book, *The Future of Socialism*,[1] and in the occasional writings which have succeeded it, Mr. Crosland has consistently maintained the view that the inherent contradictions in capitalism, which formed the central feature of the old-fashioned Socialist analysis, are now outmoded myths, since we have developed an economy so different from nineteenth-century capitalism that it merits a new name. So he looks to the United States as the model of the new, managed capitalism, in which it is possible permanently to avoid mass unemployment and to achieve a steady and satisfactory rate of economic expansion without falling into inflation. Of course, each of these post-war Affluent Societies still shows grave imperfections—here too slow a rate of growth; here headlong growth alternating with indiscriminate restriction; here injustice committed to a whole social group; here an imbalance between the private and the public sector. But none of these imperfections, in his view, is inherent in the system and most of them could be evened out by a sensible, moderate left-wing Government, led by men who both understand the management of modern capitalism and feel an urge to remove its injustices and inequalities. A Labour Government, in fact, once it can persuade the electorate to give it an adequate majority, will, if Mr. Crosland's analysis proves correct, be able to plan and control the economy without any radical change in its structure and, in particular, without any drastic enlargement of the public sector.

Let me say at once that, if I agreed with this picture of our post-war economies and accepted Mr. Crosland's optimistic predictions about the way the world will move during the 1960's, I should

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at once accept his political conclusions as well. But with one difference. If I were as convinced as he is that modern capitalism is a workable, sensible economy and so successful that sooner or later the Communist States are likely to remodel themselves on the American pattern, I should decide that the Labour Party as such had no further role to play and the time had come to reconstruct the Liberal Party as the main alternative to Conservatism. It may be replied that the revival of Liberalism would be a formidable task, but surely it would be no more formidable than the job of persuading the Labour Party that its *critique* of capitalism and its belief in public ownership as the central tenet of its creed are both entirely obsolete. And that, after all, is what the Revisionists have set themselves to do.

I now turn to an examination of the basic assumption on which the Revisionists rest their case. Are they right in assuming the stability of the Affluent Society? Are they correct to anticipate—if it is properly managed—a satisfactory rate of economic expansion? Is their confidence justified when they believe that the contradictions of pre-war capitalism have been removed? Or does our new post-war capitalism contain within it new contradictions, which cannot be resolved so long as the "commanding heights of the economy" are privately owned and controlled?

I realize, of course, that the optimism of the Revisionist analysis is shared by the vast majority of the opinion-makers throughout the Western world. Most of them, indeed, are reluctant to admit the strength either of their war-time fears that peace would bring a return to mass unemployment or of their post-war sense of relief as, year by year after 1945, the "inevitable" slump was postponed. At the end of the war, even John Maynard Keynes himself assumed that the American economy would drift into a crisis that would probably engulf Britain as well. In the United States, where fear of unemployment is much less acute, uncritical confidence in free enterprise was rapidly restored. In Britain, on the other hand, this swing of opinion away from Socialism back to free enterprise was postponed during the period of office of the Attlee Government, who were able to convince the electorate that they had averted a return to unemployment by the application of Socialist planning and controls. Actually the Labour Government did very little plan-

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ning, in the strict sense of that word, *i.e.* the settling of social priorities in terms of a long-term plan. True, they transferred to public ownership a number of basic industries and services and this enabled them to control investment in the newly created public sector. But, so far as over-all planning is concerned, all the Attlee Government did was to retain the cumbersome system of wartime controls and apply it—not unsuccessfully—to the increase of exports, the prevention of a post-war collapse of agriculture, the stimulation of private investment and the maintenance of full employment. Inevitably, as the war receded into the past, these wartime controls became more and more unpopular; even worse, they became more and more irrelevant as wartime shortages disappeared and the terms of trade unexpectedly improved. *Already by 1950 the Attlee Government was uncertain whether to liberalize the economy or to substitute a new system of Socialist peace-time planning for the war economy it had taken over in 1945.*

The irrelevance of wartime controls, however, was not fully realized until after the Tories just scraped home in 1951 and proceeded to "set the people free." In the 1951 election, the Labour Party piled up the biggest popular vote in its history, largely as the result of predicting that the return of the Tories would lead not only to war but also to mass unemployment, and it was the falsification of these predictions that made the British electorate react so violently against nationalization. And so when the Election came in 1955, British public opinion had swung from a fatuous pessimism about the prospects of Western capitalism into an equally fatuous complacency.

Throughout the 1950's that mood persisted. Less than a decade of expanding prosperity has been sufficient to erase from the voter's mind the doubts and anxieties about Western free enterprise which were still so powerful when the war finished; and to engender a complacent optimism which dismisses nationalization as an obsolete concept, with no relevance to the second half of the twentieth century. It is worth noticing, however, that these bland assumptions are challenged as soon as one leaves the North Atlantic area. Whatever doctrinal differences there may be between the Communists of Russia and of China, of Poland and of Czechoslovakia, they all agree on the premise that, outside agriculture, old-

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fashioned nationalization is the prerequisite for the kind of national planning necessary to achieve a balanced economic development.

Which of these assumptions, the Western or the Eastern, is justified by the facts? The best judges, surely, are the leaders of the uncommitted peoples. Though their preference may be for the Western way of life, they have little doubt who, in the last decade, has been winning the peaceful competition between East and West. They can see that, in a Western democracy today, life is far freer and far more comfortable for far more of the citizens than ever before in the history of the human race. Given a free choice between living in capitalist West Germany or Communist East Germany, for example, a majority of Germans opt for the West. Judged in terms of that individualistic "pursuit of happiness" which the American founding fathers laid down as the aim of their Republic, Communism is still an inferior way of life compared to that of the Affluent Societies of the West. But this does not alter the fact that, *in terms of military power, of industrial development, of technological advance, of mass literacy and, eventually, of mass consumption too, the planned Socialist economy, as exemplified in the Communist States, is proving its capacity to outpace and overtake the wealthy and comfortable Western economies.* What strikes me about the Revisionists is their parochialism. Their eyes are so firmly fixed on the mood of the British electorate, the tastes of Western consumers and the problems of the North Atlantic area that they have scarcely noticed that the enormous lead held by the West in 1945 is being narrowed by two factors. The first of these factors is the contrast between the economic use of resources possible under the planned economies of the East and the wastefulness of the artificially induced obsolescence which is the motive force of our Affluent Societies of the West. The second reason why the Communists are overhauling us is the fact that whereas, in their planned economies, inflation can be brought under control by planned income distribution, it is still the scourge of our managed Western capitalism.

Reading the writings of the Revisionists, however, one would hardly be aware that the combination of these two factors has already set in motion a historic shift in the balance of world power which may well, before the 1960's are out, have demonstrated in the

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most decisive way possible the victory of nationalization over free enterprise. At first the technological and economic achievements of the Communists were blandly disregarded. Now that it is impossible to deny their reality, three arguments are employed in order to depreciate their importance and allay the alarm they have caused. We are told (1) that, while the "great leap forward" is natural enough in backward economies, starting on the early stages of industrialization, this rate of increase is bound to slow down as the absolute strength of the Communist States approaches that of the West; (2) that the Russian sputnik and other achievements in rocketry are the results of quite abnormal concentration of effort, such as a totalitarian State can always make and from which no conclusion can be drawn about the general efficiency of the system; and, finally, (3) that, as living standards improve and education spreads, a new public opinion will be created in the Communist States, with liberalistic demands for extensions of freedom and a shift of balance from production to consumption industries. Provided, therefore, that nuclear war can be avoided, we are assured that we can look forward for the next fifty years to a period of peaceful competition, in which the intrinsic differences between Communism and Western capitalism will become less and less marked as the backward Communist nations gradually find fulfillment in a Western "pursuit of happiness."

I am not surprised that, with the change in the balance of power, the fulminations against the wickedness of Communism and the aggressive menace of the Kremlin's designs have been replaced, in Washington as well as in London, by such comforting predictions. But what does surprise and alarm me is that some Socialist economists should have joined in peddling these complacent illusions. For one of the main objectives of a fighting Socialist Opposition must be to expose the false assumptions of our Affluent Society and so force the British people to face honestly the challenge that confronts them. Far more than the revision of its constitution or of its electoral program, the Labour Party needs today a new Socialist *critique,* applied both to the Western and to the Eastern economies, which would enable us to foresee and prepare for the "creeping crisis" that will confront the West before the end of this decade.

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We can be sure that this crisis will not repeat the pattern of the 1930's and present us once again with specters of mass unemployment and under-consumption, spreading from the United States to engulf the whole world. Indeed, we should be wise to assume that, in the kind of Affluent Society which is now common to Western Europe and South America, the masses will from now on be provided with an ever wider choice of consumer goods—but only at the cost of neglecting each nation's long-term interests, scamping vital public services and imposing gross injustices on the weaker sections of the community—particularly upon the sick and the old, who rely so heavily upon State benefits.

Unfortunately Britain is likely to prove the weakest member of the Western community, since the inflation and over-consumption inherent in the Affluent Society are aggravated in this country by the deep conservatism displayed by both sides of industry. The employers' insistence on quick profits and the demand for annual wage rises forced upon the unions in a free-for-all economy have combined to keep capital investment down to a dangerously low level. As a result, this country, in the race for higher productivity, has not merely fallen far behind Russia but has been beaten by Western Germany, France and the United States. Moreover, our foreign trade is now seriously threatened by the emergence of the Common Market, whose threat has been consistently underrated by successive Governments. *Squeezed between three giants—the United States, the Common Market and the Communist bloc—there is a risk that, while the rest of the world is improving its material conditions, the British people may suffer an actual cut in their living standards.*[2]

How can a people as politically mature as the British be so blind to these dangers? How can the electorate give a third vote of confidence to the Conservative Party, which has so consistently sacrificed long-term national interests in order to provide short-term improvements in living standards? No objective observer will deny that, since 1951, there has been a scandalous neglect of many of the essentials of a healthy community—capital investment in industry, pure and applied scientific research, technological training, the expansion of higher education, the extension of hospital services and improved retirement pensions. Public connivance in this neglect

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has been obtained by two methods. (1) A mass demand for profitable but inessential consumer goods and luxuries has been stimulated by extravagantly expensive mass advertising and satisfied at the cost of the public services, but at a satisfactory rate of profit to private industry. (2) The commercialized media of mass communication have been systematically used to dope the critical faculties which would normally have been stimulated by the improvement of popular education since 1945. By the continued application of these methods it may well be possible to keep the British people complacently apathetic, while the social and moral sinews of the national organism are rapidly weakened by fatty degeneration.

What will finally confront us as a result of this decline will not be a return of the mass unemployment of the 1930's but a shrinking of the frontiers of democracy as the world balance of power shifts and the uncommitted peoples of Asia and Africa accept the economic aid and political leadership of the Communists in the modernization of their communities. If the Kremlin were manned by Cold Warriors determined to overrun the West by a display of aggressive brinkmanship, the decline of Western power which we are now witnessing might well result in a series of international crises. *In terms of military strength, it is now within the capacity of the Russian and Chinese Communists to force a showdown on such issues as Berlin, Persia and Formosa and to confront the Western powers with a choice between nuclear suicide and a series of Munich-type surrenders.* Committed to the defense of a whole series of positions which have been rendered indefensible now that we have been overtaken in the nuclear arms race, we could do little to protest if the Russians were barbaric enough to call our bluff—by proceeding to mop up three key positions which we now hold only by the tolerance of Mr. Khrushchev in West Berlin, Quemoy and Teheran. By signing a peace treaty with the East Germans, instigating a revolution in Persia or providing the Chinese with nuclear weapons, the Russians could now make each of these positions untenable.

No one can exclude the possibility of a series of surrenders of this kind. Nevertheless, I am not convinced that this is the main danger which the West now faces. It seems to me probable that the Communists have taken our measure fairly accurately. Unlike Stalin,

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Khrushchev probably appreciates that the only thing which can rally the West and force it to mobilize its strength is a repetition of the kind of strong-arm action which we saw in the Berlin blockade and the attack on South Korea. In an actual war, or under direct threat of military aggression, the Affluent Societies of the West can be persuaded to cut back their ostentatious spending and accept a degree at least of national planning and international cooperation. *Though Mao Tse-tung may be tempted to follow a Stalinite line, it seems to me unlikely that Khrushchev will commit the mistake of saving the Western powers from the comfortable process of peace-time degeneration on which they have now begun.* For the Kremlin is now convinced that the only thing which could prevent the ultimate victory of world Communism is nuclear war. Their determination to practice peaceful coexistence, therefore, is a sign not of weakness but of confidence. When they challenge us to disarm immediately and enter into peaceful competition, they do so because they are sure they will win the contest.

Which system is best equipped for rapidly modernizing the under-developed territories, raising their living standards and helping to provide mass education—the Western Affluent Society or Eastern Communism? The Kremlin is sure that, in the course of the next twenty years, the North Atlantic area will become a prosperous backwater, while vast areas of Asia, the Middle East, Africa and, finally, South America—which at present still accept some of our ideals of freedom and still look to us for assistance—are absorbed into the Communist bloc. Recent history supports their confidence. Anyone who suggested ten years ago that the new Aswan dam would be financed by Russia and constructed by Russian engineers would have been dismissed as either a fellow traveller or a defeatist. Even five years ago it would have been difficult to take seriously the prediction that a Cuban Government in 1959 would be entertaining Mr. Mikoyan and considering the possibility of buying Russian arms with which to defend its freedom from mainland interference. The fact that these two "absurdities" have become sober truth illustrates the shift in the balance of power, and they will be followed throughout the 1960's by even more humiliating examples, unless we are prepared radically to transform the nature of our Affluent Societies and, in particular, their economic relations with Asia and Africa.

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It has often been stated that the whole future of Western freedom depends upon the amount of aid which the Western democracies are prepared to give to the Indian nation in its effort to modernize and industrialize itself while retaining the political forms of Western democracy. What is not so often stated is that the chances of the Indian Government succeeding in this attempt depend very largely upon the role which the nationalized industries are permitted to play in the Indian economy. If the price of large-scale Western aid is that the Indian Government should increase the proposed size of the private and decrease that of the public sector of the economy, then the aid we give may actually decrease the chances of success. *Political democracy, in fact, can only be assured in this overpopulated and under-developed sub-continent in the kind of Socialist planned economy which would be condemned by Top People in London, Washington, Paris and Bonn as totalitarian.*

Nor can we assume that public opinion in these countries will always prefer Western democracy to the Communist way of life. For whereas we can still claim that life in Western Europe is much more comfortable and much freer for the masses than it is in Eastern Europe, the same is not true when we compare Eastern Europe with, for example, the Middle East or South East Asia. Many Poles who visit both London and Moscow are deeply envious of our way of life; but an Iraqi, Egyptian, Burmese or Siamese who makes the same two-way trip could reach a rather different conclusion. Instead of preferring Western freedom to Communist totalitarianism, he may well feel he has more to learn in Moscow, East Berlin and Prague than in Washington, London or Bonn about the task of rapidly modernizing a backward country and raising the living standards of the masses. The luxuries, gadgets, entertainments and packaged foodstuffs which so many workers enjoy in our Affluent Societies may strike him as irrelevant and even vulgar and immoral, compared with the solid respectability of the Communist way of life. It is, indeed, a most dangerous assumption that, even if they could be given a truly free choice between the "Roundhead" standards of Communist collectivism and the "Cavalier" luxuries of Western individualism, all the peoples of Asia and Africa would be bound to prefer our Restoration. And, anyway, such a free choice will not be given them. In the next twenty years the big decisions will be taken

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in these countries not by mass electorates but by eager, educated *elites,* to whom the enthusiastic certainties of Communist dogma make a much stronger appeal than the sophisticated scepticism of our Western democracy.

It is possible, therefore, to predict with a good deal of assurance that, until and unless there is a fundamental change in the structure of our modern and managed capitalism, the peaceful competition which has now begun between East and West must result in a series of Communist successes.

True enough, the peoples of the West have recently recognized the evils of colonialism and at long last have begun to realize that the principles of democracy—equality as well as liberty and fraternity—must be applied between nations as well as within each nation. In Britain, for example, there has been national approval for the decision of the Conservative Government to abandon the Empire throughout Africa and to make it clear that the white settler cannot rely on British support in maintaining his ascendancy. But good intentions—even mass good intentions—are not sufficient. What matters in relations with Asia and Africa is not what ordinary people think and feel but what economic policies our Governments adopt. Our Western way of life may seem tolerable to the non-political worker in the British or American motor-car factory. It may at first sight seem heaven on earth to a visitor from East Germany or Poland. But the colonial peoples are bound to view it more suspiciously, and they will regard us as enemies if our Governments decide that our economic relations with those countries should for the most part be conducted by private financial and business interests, whose sole concern it must be to buy cheap and sell dear. *It is not sufficient merely to wind up colonialism, in the sense of ending the direct administration of these territories by European officials. What is even more important is to end indirect colonialism, and that can only be done by subordinating all private enterprise in our trade with these ex-colonial areas to strict public control.* Until that is done, no British Colombo Plan or American program of economic aid, however ambitious, can halt the advance of Communist influence in Asia and Africa. This advance has already begun and will proceed even more rapidly in the course of this decade.

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How will the Western people react when they are confronted with what will seem to them a shameful and inexplicable series of diplomatic reverses and withdrawals? There are some who will claim that public opinion will not be stirred out of its complacency. Why should anyone in Düsseldorf, Birmingham, Montreal or Detroit be disturbed by the shrinking of Western world influence, provided his own standard of living is not affected? If the peoples of the North Atlantic area can be assured, they say, of their material well-being and national security, they will be only too ready to give up the "white man's burden" and leave his civilizing mission and world leadership to Moscow and Peking.

Personally I have sometimes been tempted by the arguments for a Little England policy, and I have never doubted that there are a very large number of Americans who would also be content with a "Little America" policy. It is by no means irrational to hold the view that our Western civilization has had its day, that the cultural leadership of the world is rapidly moving eastwards and that our role in the next hundred years is to be not the sun in the center of the system but an unambitious outer planet, placidly rotating in the reflected light of the new, Communist world civilization. Nevertheless, it would be self-deception to base our policies on the assumption that the Affluent Societies of the West can so easily opt out of their world responsibilities and surrender leadership for the sake of material comforts.

It is far more likely that, when the trend of world development becomes clear and the Communist victories are undeniable, a deep revulsion will set in. Gradually our peoples will be shaken out of their comfortable affluence. Gradually their eyes will be opened to the threat to democratic values which for years has been concealed from them by Governments systematically appeasing the private profit-makers at the cost of public service and public enterprise. And one day anger will replace complacency. There will be a return of that sense of betrayal and that readiness to repudiate the "guilty men" with which the British people, in November 1938, awoke to the crimes of appeasement.

In those days, however, once the spell was broken, the Churchillian way of salvation was blessedly clear. In 1940 Britain had to make good the damage caused during the "years of the

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locusts" by fighting alone and so giving the Americans and Russians time to win a war that need never have grown great if we had dealt with the disease in good time. *In the nuclear age, however, war will provide no solution of our crisis. We shall have to drag ourselves out of the comfortable sloth of the 1950's—without blowing the world to pieces.* Churchill could enjoin a policy of blood and sweat and demand a suspension of free enterprise and the rights of property in order to produce the weapons with which to defeat the enemy. In the crisis which lies ahead, we shall need a leadership that enjoins just as arduous a sacrifice of material comforts and insists just as sharply on the subordination of private property to the national interest.

But this time there will be no enemy to fight and the object will be to make the community capable not of winning a war but of holding its own in a peaceful competition, which will decide whether the pattern of World Government will be democratic or totalitarian Socialism. In 1940 Mr. Churchill asked only for a temporary subordination of private profit-making to the public interest, and five years after that war was over he himself headed the Government which reasserted the primacy of the private over the public interest. This time the "commanding heights of the economy" must be captured and held permanently for the public interest.

It is, I believe, for this creeping crisis of the 1960's and 1970's that the leadership of the Labour Party should hold itself in reserve, refusing in any way to come to terms with the Affluent Society, warning the electorate of the troubles that lie ahead and explaining why they can only be tackled by ensuring that public enterprise dominates the whole economy and creates the climate in which private enterprise works. By starting the job now, when the public still retains its blind trust in the Tory Government, the Labour Party may incur a temporary unpopularity, but it will be creating the conditions for gaining the confidence of the electorate when its harsh predictions come true.

"*When* its predictions come true? By what right," it may be asked, "can the future be anticipated with such gloomy confidence? Is not the Socialist who bases his political strategy on this kind of prediction falling into the mistake of those Marxists who discredited

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their theory of capitalism by demonstrating that its inherent contradictions would *inevitably* lead to its breakdown?" It would be folly indeed if we failed to learn from this sad example. But, as Aneurin Bevan and John Strachey have pointed out in two remarkable and sadly underestimated books,[3] the failure of Marx's predictions was largely due to his rigid assumption that capitalism could not modify itself. What he failed to recognize was not only that the entrepreneurs' survival instinct would stimulate them to evolve a modern, managed capitalism, but also that democracy was a dynamic force in its own right. Mr. Strachey's greatest contribution to Socialist thinking has been his subtle and perceptive demonstration of the revolutionary changes in the economy produced by the workings of Western democracy. So far from remaining a mere superstructure, wholly conditioned by economic forces, our democratic institutions have revealed a potent power of social and economic change and in so doing have resolved one of the inherent contradictions that Marx attributed to capitalism. On his theory, the capitalist system *must* break down owing to an ever growing unbalance between an exaggerated production of capital goods and an equally exaggerated dwindling of consumers' demand. But in fact, as a result of democracy, the development has gone in exactly the opposite direction, so that now the prevailing characteristic (which is also the greatest weakness) of the Western economies is that they consume too much of their resources and reserve too little for public services and capital development. Ironically enough, the nations which do show the true Marxist contradiction are those of the Communist bloc, where consumption is nearly always starved for the sake of rapid capital development.

The actual developments of the last hundred years, therefore, have completely falsified Marx's central prediction. But the lesson we should draw from his failure is that which both Mr. Bevan and Mr. Strachey draw. Marx was not wrong to insist that Socialists must base their policy and strategy on the best available analysis and anticipation of how the political economy will develop. The errors he made and which we must seek to avoid were, first his refusal to admit that in social change politics may be as dynamic a force as economics; and, secondly, his failure to forsee the strength of the survival instinct and the powers of adaptability which would

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be revealed by the Conservative forces that control capitalism. These forces, as we now know, are ready to accept even radical changes, such as those recommended by Keynes, in order to preserve their power. As a result, just a hundred years after the writing of *Das Kapital,* the Western world has resolved the central contradiction of pre-war capitalism. But this has only been achieved at the cost of producing a new and equally dangerous contradiction. This new contradiction *can* be resolved, as its predecessor was resolved. Indeed, the main function of the Socialist in the 1960's is to explain how this can be done, and the main function of the Labour Party is to do it. For once again it is perfectly possible to cure what looks at first sight like an inherent and incurable weakness in our economic system by political action, designed to adapt our democratic institutions to the needs of the times.

There is an urgent need for political economists and sociologists to follow up Professor Galbraith's brilliant initiative by driving his analysis to its real conclusion and also by describing in detail the British variant of the Affluent Society.[4] All I can hope to do here is to list in summary form the main features of the central contradiction that now confronts us; to indicate why that contradiction, unless it is resolved, will inevitably make us the losers in peaceful competition with the East; and finally, to suggest the measures necessary to get Britain out of her special impasse.

Our analysis must start by noting two central features—one a strength, the other a weakness—which all the Western democracies, despite the differences between them, have in common and which separate them from Communist governments. *The strength of the democracies is the existence of civil and political liberties as organic parts of the State structure. Their weakness is the complete failure to subject irresponsible economic power to public control.* One of the most alarming symptoms of Western decadence is the modern tendency to treat the liberties of the citizen as a "weakness" of democracy and to explain the successes of the Kremlin by pointing to the "obvious" advantages any Communist leader has as the unquestioned head of a totalitarian State. The reverse, of course, is true. All the weaknesses of Communism derive from the crude brutalities of the one-party state and the absence of the institutions of civil liberty

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—an independent judiciary, an independent civil service, independent organs of public opinion and truly voluntary organizations, including trade unions. Those who imagine that Russian Communism would be weakened if Khrushchev succeeds in liberalizing the system and encourages the growth of these free institutions are under a grave delusion. If the Russian Communists could really add these democratic strengths to the strength of a Socialist State which has already conquered irresponsible economic power and subjected it to public control, they would make their system irresistible.

What enables the Communist States to achieve their successes —despite all the inefficiencies and brutalities perpetrated by their totalitarian rulers—is the fact that their governments possess (1) the power to take vital decisions and the knowledge on which to base them, and (2) the political and social instruments by means of which those vital decisions can be put into effect. A Communist government, for example, can allocate the national resources according to a system of priorities, allotting so much to produce goods, so much to consumer goods, so much to health, education, defense, thereby reducing the hazards of investment and accelerating development. In contrast, the government of a Western democracy, even under the post-war system of managed capitalism, cannot even begin to draw up a national resources budget of this kind, far less put it into effect. Whereas it can impose its will on the small public sector of the economy, it has only the crudest instruments for regulating the development of the dominant private sector. This is the reason why growth is retarded in comparison with that achieved by the Communists.

But the difference goes even further. The motive forces which regulate the development of a Communist economy are the five-year plan and the instruments for putting it into practice. The motive force which drives a modern capitalist economy is neither the Government nor the Government Departments but the decisions of those who direct the great combines which now dominate the private sector. In dealing with the oligopolists, the Government in Britain today is in a position not unlike that of the luckless King John, when confronted with his feudal barons. Like him, our modern Executive has been constrained to concede a Magna Carta, which

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lays down the rights not of the ordinary citizen but of an oligarchy, deeply divided against itself but united in its determination to resist domination by the political Executive. More and more decisions which determine our development have been removed from Westminster and Whitehall. Then where are they taken? The truth is that normally they are not taken at all and the determination of some of the greatest issues of our national economy is left to the free interplay of the great concentrations of power. Occasionally, however, a decision *is* forced upon the Government by the pressures of the democratic system. If the absence of national planning threatens serious injury to organized labor, to the farming interests, to the Catholic Church or to any other of the well organized and powerful pressure groups that operate in our society, then the Government may be forced to intervene—even to curb the activities of the oligopolists.

An example of this process is to be found in the Government's reactions to local unemployment. Strictly speaking, a modern managed capitalism is not harmed by local unemployment: indeed, the competition on which it depends may be discouraged by governmental action which seeks to bring jobs to the workers instead of compelling the worker to move to the job. Since, however, the British electorate is still quite unusually sensitive to the threat of unemployment, the Government has found it expedient to induce prosperous industries to move into hard-hit areas—Merseyside and the Glasgow area, for example.

It is worth noticing, however, what happens in such cases. There is no question of the Government *ordering* Fords or Vauxhalls or the Rootes Group to establish their new factories in a particular area. It might, like King John, like to do so, but it lacks not only the will to give a command of this kind but the instruments with which to put it into effect. So what happens is a long-drawn-out negotiation between the Minister and the oligopolists in question, after which they graciously agree to stretch a point and help the nation—provided the Government gives them a suitable reward.

This explains one odd contradiction in the Affluent Society. The ordinary citizen feels that he is living in a community where the state grows ever more powerful, remote and arbitrary; and, from his point of view, this description is correct. But, in its relations with

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the oligopolists, the "all-powerful" State behaves very differently, negotiating agreements instead of issuing edicts. The ordinary citizen *must* pay his taxes or go to prison; the oligopolist *negotiates* an annual tax agreement, in which he can often set his own terms.

A hundred years ago, when the scale of industry was small, it was at least rational to argue that, by reducing the power of the State over the economy and substituting the working of free competition for governmental decision, a society might develop more healthily and achieve more human happiness than under a paternal and interfering government. But in our age, with its tendency for ever greater concentrations of economic power and ever more centralized control of commercial mass communications, the relationship between free enterprise and individual freedom or consumer's choice has, as Galbraith shows, become exceedingly remote. Democratic constitutions, therefore, which were traditionally evolved in order to check the power of the Executive and prevent central despotism, are now employed mainly to preserve the irresponsible power of oligopoly from any kind of popular control.

In his Fabian Lecture,[5] Professor Richard Titmuss carried Galbraith's analysis of modern oligopoly one stage further by applying it to a single and apparently relatively harmless segment of the British economy. He showed how, since 1945, an immense new jungle of irresponsible power has been created by the growth of pension schemes, stimulated by lavish tax concessions and financed partly by insurance companies and partly by trustee funds. Professor Titmuss declared that the creation of these huge pension funds constitutes

> a major shift in economic power in our society. It is a power, a potential power, to affect many important aspects of our economic life and our social values in the 1960's. It is power concentrated in relatively few hands, working at the apex of a handful of giant bureaucracies, technically supported by a group of professional experts, and accountable, in practice, to virtually no one.

He showed how these private pension schemes did something to fill the vacuum created by the failure of the State to provide an adequate subsistence pension. But he also showed how this mushroom development has created gross inequalities as between those inside

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and those outside the schemes. Even worse, it tempts the Government to renege on its responsibility for providing security in old age and leave it to Big Business, at its own discretion, to build up its own "private-enterprise welfare state." As the scale of organization gets larger and as the concentrations of power grow ever greater, there should be a corresponding increase of public service and democratic control. But in fact what we see is a dwindling role for Government. "This is retreat from Government," he concludes; "a retreat into irresponsibility."

At first sight it is surprising that this retreat from Government has been greeted with enthusiasm by the voter in all the countries of the West. When the war ended, public opinion, in North America as well as in Western Europe, still dreaded the return of mass unemployment and was ready to welcome great extensions of public ownership, of State control and interference in the private sector and of State provision of social services. Now, fifteen years later, public opinion has turned not only against nationalization but against extensions of the Welfare State; and most of the European labor movements have either abandoned their Socialism already or begun to consider the possibility of doing so. The reason for this extraordinary reversal is clear. Together with the rapid movement towards irresponsible oligopoly, there has proceeded a rapid, if uneven, improvement in living standards. Since World War II, throughout the West, democratic institutions have been used with even greater success than before the war to create effective consumer demand. The constant trade union pressure for higher wages, the success of farmers' organizations in extracting huge subsidies from their governments, and the favor shown by the woman voter to any politician who promises to increase her spending power—these and other factors, when combined with full employment, have obtained huge concessions for the masses and given them the feeling that they "have never had it so good."

The oligopolists, moreover, once they had learnt the Keynesian doctrine, were quick to see that it was in their interest to ensure that the volume of private spending was constantly increased, while the volume of public expenditure was kept as low as possible. During the war and the immediate post-war years, a gigantic volume of pent-up popular demand for consumer goods, household goods, gad-

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gets and luxuries had been created. Instead of having plenty of money in our pockets and little to spend it on except cheap rationed essentials, we all wanted a world in which rationing was replaced by the widest range of consumer choice. And when our natural desire to make up for wartime scarcity was further stimulated by enormously expensive and sophisticated advertising campaigns and the temptations of hire purchase, the consumer demand swelled even further.

At the very moment, however, when each of us wanted to restock our homes, the community had equally urgent needs for repairing the damages of war, for building not only the houses but roads and railways, the hospitals, schools and universities and—most important of all—for re-equipping our basic industries. Thus a tremendous conflict developed between the demands of the community and the individual consumer, and between those of the public and private sectors of the economy.

It was a conflict, however, in which victory for one side was predetermined. Whether, as was done under the Attlee Government, the attempt was made to exert direct control on the private sector or whether control was limited, as under the Tories, to fiscal sanctions made surprisingly little difference. *For the dynamo which keeps our modern Affluent Society moving is the big consumption industries, particularly the motor-car industry. It is only by permitting a constant increase in the size, profitability and political importance of these industries that an old-fashioned slump is avoided.* The prosperity of America, it has been ironically observed, and with it the security of the whole Western world, depends on whether the American people can be persuaded each year to consume six million new cars. If, in any year, that figure falls to four million, there is a sharp recession; if to two million, a (non-Communist) world slump.

There is one important deduction from Professor Galbraith's analysis which British Socialists have been extremely reluctant to make. If the health of the Western economies depends on artificially creating an ever more extravagant demand for increasingly unnecessary consumer goods, then the maintenance of public services must *always* take second place to the satisfaction of private consumer needs. For the money to pay for these public services derives from taxation, whose level, so long as the private sector dominates

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the economy, must depend on the profitability of industry. How many schools we can have, how many roads we can build, how much of our resources we can allocate to scientific research—the answer to these questions depends, under our system of managed capitalism, on the number of golden eggs that are laid by these oligopolistic geese.

Theoretically, of course, these deficiencies in the public service could be made good over a period by imposing taxation heavy enough to raise all the revenue required. A Socialist Government, it is often argued, would be able to finance the huge extensions of welfare education and other public services to which it is committed by encouraging a much faster rate of development in the private sector of industry and then taxing away a sufficient amount of the profits. This was the policy put forward by the Labour Party at the October election and in the short run any Labour Government would have to attempt it. But experience should have taught us that the run might be very short indeed. In the Affluent Society *no* Government is able to give orders to Big Business. After one Budget a Labour Chancellor who tried to squeeze private industry too hard would soon discover that he was not master in his own house and that there is a relatively low level above which taxation rates, whether on the individual or on the company, are only raised at the cost of provoking tax evasion and avoidance so widespread that revenue is actually reduced. If the motive force of your economy is the profit-making of large-scale modern private enterprise, a Labour Chancellor must be prepared to allow very large profits indeed and to admit that the number of golden eggs he can remove is extremely limited.

In recent months we have seen remarkable evidence of resistance by Big Business to public spending, even where national security is involved. When faced with clear evidence that the Russians are rapidly overtaking it in the nuclear race, many of us assumed that the Eisenhower Administration would feel itself compelled to allocate enough of the national resources to nuclear warfare in order to keep ahead. No doubt the White House would have liked to do so, but it proved impossible. Although he knew that the present levels of American defense spending would permit the Rus-

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sians to forge ahead, Mr. Eisenhower has preferred to accept defeat in the nuclear race. As a Socialist, I do not myself believe that, by accepting Russian dominance in nuclear weapons, the Americans subject themselves to any very acute military risks. But the American politicians and Big Businessmen who refused to increase the defense budget did so though they were convinced that they were thereby putting their country in the deadliest peril. Nothing could demonstrate more clearly than this the inherent contradiction which ensures that, in our Affluent Society, while the individual grows rapidly more comfortable, the community becomes even more rapidly weaker and weaker. For the inherent inability of the system to allocate sufficient resources for national defense is repeated in relation to education, scientific development, health and welfare services. *The price which the modern, managed capitalism pays for avoiding the old-fashioned crisis of mass unemployment is the continuous sacrifice of public service, community welfare and national security to private profit.*

That is why we can predict with mathematical certainty that, as long as the public sector of industry remains the minority sector throughout the Western world, we are bound to be defeated in every kind of peaceful competition which we undertake with the Russians and the Eastern bloc. It is not that our workers are less skillful and energetic, that our managers are less competent, or even that our politicians do their job any worse. The truth is that, whatever our intentions, wishes or individual capabilities, the nations of the Western world will be unable to strengthen themselves by developing adequate public services until the public sector becomes the dominant sector in our economies.

The idea that we can achieve the same ends by leaving the great concerns in private hands and controlling their development from Whitehall is as illusory as the concept that their profits can be taxed to pay for the Welfare State. We are faced with a sharp choice. Either we accept the Affluent Society as we know it, including the limitations on State activity and public spending that it implies. In that case there is everything to be said for permitting the Labour Party to die away and building in its place a Liberal Party as an alternative Government within the Establishment. *Alterna-*

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tively—if we are not prepared to see the Labour Party wither away —we must be prepared to reshape its policies so as to present an outright Socialist challenge to the Affluent Society and give warning of the coming crisis. In so doing we should make it unambiguously clear that, if we are given a mandate, we shall overcome this crisis by deliberately reversing the balance of the economy and ensuring that the public dominates over the private sector. For only in this way shall we make it possible to work out a true national resources budget, which strikes the proper balance between production and consumption goods and ensures that community interests are given their proper priority over individual consumption..

A Socialist program of this kind will involve transferring gigantic powers, which are now dispersed among the oligopolists, to the central Government and the planning authorities which it would have to establish. Of course there would be dangers to freedom in this process of subjecting irresponsible economic power to public control. The increased power of the Executive which Socialist planning must bring will be in danger of degenerating into the kind of totalitarianism we have seen in Eastern Europe unless it is counter-balanced by a revival of the challenge which Parliament used to make to the Executive. Since the war we have watched a dreary process by which the House of Commons has been progressively deprived of effective authority until it is in danger of becoming one of the ceremonial aspects of the Constitution, alongside the Monarchy and the House of Lords. But this draining away of the power of decision which used to reside in Parliament has not brought an increase of Cabinet or Ministerial authority. On the contrary, the power of decision which Cabinet, before the era of oligopoly, used to possess, at least within limited spheres, has been steadily decreased, until today, as Professor Titmuss has shown, we are witnessing *a retreat from Government*. Democratic control of the forces which determine social and political development is steadily declining and with it the ability of the nation to act as a nation and of the people to exert a free democratic will. *If the Western world is free, as it certainly is, from the terrible evils of totalitarianism, it is the victim of an even more debilitating disease—the emergence of a modern feudalism, which is strangling our democracy before it has had time to grow up.*

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Five years ago I pointed to the danger of this "new despotism" and indicated the dilemma with which the modern Socialist is faced.[6] "Since the abuses of oligopoly," I wrote, "cannot be checked by a free competition, the only way to enlarge freedom and achieve a full democracy is to subject the economy to public control. Yet the State bureaucracy itself is one of those concentrations of power which threaten our freedom. If we increase its authority still further, shall we not be endangering the liberties we are trying to defend?" And I suggested that this dilemma could only be resolved by ensuring that the necessary extensions of public ownership should be counter-balanced by expanding the constitutional and judicial safeguards of personal freedom; by reviving Parliament's traditional function of controlling and checking the Executive; and by curbing the oligarchic tendencies both in the trade unions and in the party machines. It seems to me that, in the five years since this lecture was published, the case has been strengthened by events. The oligopolists have increased their power; the authority of the Executive has been correspondingly weakened; and the vitality of Parliament has even further declined. That is why I still believe that "constitutional reform, designed to enlarge freedom and stimulate an active democracy, is at least as important as the extension of public ownership and a redistribution of wealth."

1. Published by Jonathan Cape, 1956.
2. Anyone who thinks these statements too gloomy should remember that Germany, France—and even the much poorer Italy—are devoting a larger share than we are of their national income to production investment and increasing their industrial efficiency much faster. Whereas our output since 1953 has increased by 28 per cent, theirs has increased by 70 per cent. The inferiority of our economic performance to that of the Soviet Union is even more striking. Russian production per head is likely to surpass ours in the early 1960's, and that of the U.S. by the late 70's. Moreover, a large part of our affluence during the 1960's was due not to our own efforts but to the cheapening of our imports. A 10 per cent worsening of the terms at which we exchange our industrial exports for food and raw materials would be sufficient to condemn us to material stagnation. Nor should it be forgotten that Russia, owing to the very high cost of producing food and raw materials at home, may well enter these markets and start exporting manufactures in order to import food and raw materials. By forcing up the price of sugar, meat and

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maize, she could benefit herself and these producers of raw materials at our expense.

3. *In Place of Fear,* by Aneurin Bevan, Heinemann, 1952. *Contemporary Capitalism,* by John Stratchey, Gollancz, 1956.
4. This work has already been begun by Dr. Thomas Balogh. I should like to acknowledge here the debt I owe not merely to his occasional writings but even more to the stimulus of his conversation. I have also profited greatly by reading, in advance of publication, some chapter of his forthcoming book, *The Political Economy of Co-existence* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1960).
5. *The Irresponsible Society.* Fabian Tract 323, April 1960.
6. *Socialism and the New Despotism.* Fabian Tract 298, 1956.

REVENANT

(For my Daughter: Eighteenth Winter)

Who is that bird now whispering in the snow
With feet steady and young? The violent glance
Battered you where you stood and fleered the air
With pain. Follow those wings! And if they dance

Headily into the iron mazes, hope
That the branch's spoke will bend, and if they leap
Into the gullies of snow, the lightless dunes
Will fold them in the humbling breath of sleep

Safe, never to rise, until your heart,
Shed at last of the stone of fear, can run
To seize a flyer of grief from a childhood's night,
Hallow the wings, shadow the bitter sun.

Stanley Burnshaw

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MODERN EVIDENCE

Vissarion Belinsky

LETTERS TO V. P. BOTKIN

Introductory Note.—*Vissarion Belinsky (1811-1848), justly enough considered to be "the father of the Russian intelligentsia," is one of the major figures in Russian thought of the nineteenth century. Historically speaking, he is also of course the most important of Russian literary critics, for his was the leading part in the formation of the new realistic literature, combining the protest of the "civic conscience" with fidelity to life, which emerged in the 1840's. His appraisal of the writers who began appearing in print during the years of his critical activity—among them Gogol, Goncharov, Turgenev and Dostoevsky—has been thoroughly vindicated by the judgment of later generations. No strictures on Belinsky's faults of style and the occasional fuzziness of his aesthetic theorizing can reduce the credit due him for that achievement.*

Under the conditions of arbitrary censorship prevailing during the reign of Nicholas I, Belinsky was often compelled to state his ideas in an Aesopian mode, the real intent of which is often lost on readers unfamiliar with the Russian tradition. In his letters, however, Belinsky—nicknamed "Vissarion the Furious" because of the passionate intensity and extremity of his nature—could and did express himself to the top of his bent. Next to his famous "Letter to Gogol," long banned in Russia as a document of fiery subversion, his letters to V. P. Botkin, a friend and critical writer of liberal views, are among his most remarkable productions, indispensable to an understanding of his ideological development and his moral and intellectual temper. The following three letters, in particular, teem with ideas that have played a fateful role in modern times.

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Especially noteworthy is the repudiation of Hegel's absolute idealism in the name of the actual individual, a repudiation that closely parallels Kierkegaard's existential attack on the German philosopher; the clear anticipation of Dostoevsky's thought in The Brothers Karamazov (*like Ivan, Belinsky refuses to pay the price in present degradation and suffering for the promise of future harmony and universal reconciliation*); *and, lastly, the truly eschatological vision of a social Utopia, of a human world fully pledged to love and justice, which, inconsistenty enough however, is not be gained without violent upheavals and bloodshed ("men are so witless that they must be forcibly brought to happiness"). On that side of him Belinsky is indeed, as a number of commentators have pointed out, the direct precursor of the Leninist morality of revolution.*

These letters, written in 1841, mark Belinsky's extreme turn in renouncing with characteristic vehemence the conservative Hegelianism of his so-called middle period, the period when in spite of his innermost inclinations he accepted the identification of the real with the rational and the primacy of the historical process as a whole over the claims of the person, the individual, the subject immersed in his unique and inescapable temporality. It is in this last period that Belinsky wholly came into his own, becoming the indisputable leader of the Westernizing and socialist tendency in the ideology of the Russian intellectuals.—P.R.

I

St. Petersburg, March 1, 1841

. . . I have long suspected that Hegel's philosophy is no more than a moment, though a great one, that its absolute results are not worth a—, that it were better to die than to be reconciled to them. Fools lie when they say that Hegel turned life into dead schemes; but it is true that he turned its phenomena into spooks clasping bony hands and twirling in the air over a cemetery. For him the subject is not an end in itself but only a means for the momentary expression of the Universal, and in relation to the subject this Universal becomes a Moloch; when the subject's day is over it is cast off by this Moloch like an old pair of trousers. I have especially important reasons for being incensed with Hegel, for in remaining faithful to him I managed to reconcile myself to

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the Russian reality, and came to praise Zagoskin[1] and similar abominations, and to hate Schiller. . . . All of Hegel's reasonings about morality are sheer nonsense, for in the objectified realm of thought there can be no moral values, just as there are none in objectified religion (in Hindoo pantheism, for example, Brahma and Shiva are equal gods, that is to say, good and evil are equally autonomous).

I know you will laugh at me, you baldpate, but I will stick to my idea. The fate of the subject, the individual, the person is of more importance to me than the fate of the whole world and the well-being of the Chinese Emperor (namely, the Hegelian *Allgemeinheit*). I am told: develop the treasures of your spirit for the sake of its free self-delectation, cry to console yourself, grieve in order to rejoice anew, strive to attain perfection, climb to the top-rung of the evolutionary ladder and if you stumble down you go—to the devil, you son of a bitch! I thank you humbly, Yegor Fedorovitch[2], and I bow down to your philosophical nightcap; but I have the honor to inform you, with all due respect to your philosophical philistinism, that even if I succeeded in climbing to the top of the ladder I would still demand of you an account of all the victims of the conditions of life and history, of chance, superstition, the Inquisition, Philip II, etc., etc. Otherwise there would be nothing left for me but to throw myself down headlong from the very top of the ladder. Even if I were to receive it gratis I do not want happiness, so long as I am not reassured as to the fate of my blood-brothers, bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. It is said that dishonesty is the pre-condition of harmony; perhaps so; lovers of music may find the prospect agreeable and advantageous, but it is not a bit agreeable for those doomed to express the "idea" of disharmony. . . . The extract from Echtermeyer delighted me because it administers an energetic rap on Hegel's philosophical cap, thus demonstrating that for Germans too it is possible to cease being Germans and become human beings. . . .

I belong to those men who see the devil's tail in everything—that, it appears, is my very latest world-outlook, the one I will die with. Even though it makes me suffer, I am not ashamed of it. Man knows nothing about himself—everything depends on the spectacles provided by his disposition and the caprice of his nature. A year ago my thought was diametrically the opposite of what it

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is today, and, in truth, I don't know whether I am fortunate or unfortunate in being so constituted that for me to think and to feel, to understand and to suffer are one and the same thing. And this is where fanaticism comes in. Do you know that my present self hates my past self and that if I had the power it would surely go ill with those who are today what I was a year ago. In finding oneself alive in a coffin with hands tied behind one's back how can one help seeing the devil's tail everywhere! What is it to me that some day reason will triumph, that the future will be good, when fate has consigned me to be the witness of chance, unreason and brute force? What is it to me that your children and mine will enjoy the good when through no fault of my own I am so badly off now? Shall I simply retreat into myself? No, far better to die, to be a living corpse! The promise of recovery is nothing but words, mere words! You write me that you have outlived your love and have lost the capacity of loving. . . . I feel the same; philistines, men meanly concerned with immediate reality alone, are laughing at us and celebrating their victory. Ah, woe, woe, woe! But of all that later. . . .

A fine Prussian government, in which we fancied to see the ideal of a rational State! What is there to say?—scoundrels, tyrants lording it over mankind! A member of the triple alliance of the executioners of liberty and reason. So that's your Hegel. . . . The most rational government is that of the North American States, and right below it I rank the governments of England and France. . . .

II

St. Petersburg, June 28, 1841

. . . On your advice I have bought Destunis's *Plutarch* and read it. It has driven me wild. Good God, how much life is still stirring in me that will go to waste! Of all the heroes of antiquity three have won all my love, adoration and enthusiasm—Timeleon and the Gracchuses. The life of Cato (of Utica and not the Elder brute) exhales the sombre grandeur of tragedy: what a noble personality! Pericles and Alcibiades have exacted from me the full tribute of wonder and delight. What about Caesar?—you will ask. My friend, let me tell you that at present I am utterly absorbed

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and devoured by a single idea. You know that I am not destined to hit the truth at its core, uniformly surveying all that surrounds it—no, somehow I always run to extremes. So I am now caught up by the idea of civic virtue, of the pathos of truth and honor, apart from which I can hardly respond to greatness anywhere. Now you will understand why Timeleon, the Gracchuses and Cato of Utica (not that red-headed brute the Elder) have quite eclipsed Caesar and the Macedonian in my eyes. There has developed in me a kind of wild, frenzied, fanatical love of freedom and the independent human personality, which are possible only in a society founded on truth and virtue. In taking up Plutarch I imagined that the Greeks would overshadow the Romans—it turned out quite the other way. I raved over Pericles and Alcibiades, but the austere grandeur of Timeleon and Phocion (those Greco-Romans) shut off from me the beautiful and graceful images of Athens' representatives. In the Roman lives my soul floated as in an ocean. Through Plutarch I came to understand much I had not grasped before. A new humanity grew up on the soil of Greece and Rome. But for them the Middle Ages would have achieved nothing. I also understood the French revolution with its Roman pomp at which I once laughed. I grasped, too, Marat's sanguinary love of liberty, his sanguinary hatred of everything wishing to separate itself from the brotherhood of man even by so much as an armorial carriage. How fascinating is the world of antiquity. It contains the germ of all that is great, noble and virtuous, for the basis of its life was the pride of personality, inviolable personal dignity. Yes, the Greek and Latin languages must be the cornerstone of all education, the foundation of schooling.

Strange that my life is in sheer apathy, sloth, a stagnant mire. But at the bottom somewhere there is a fiery sea. I was always afraid that with the passing of the years my feelings would gradually die away—the exact opposite has happened. I am disenchanted with everything, believe in no one, love nothing and nobody, still the interests of prosaic life absorb me less and less, and I am becoming more and more a citizen of the universe. The mad craving for love is devouring me inside, the yearning grows ever more persistent and painful. That is myself, mine, and that alone. But I am also strongly concerned with what is not mine. Human personality

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so obsesses me that I am afraid I will go mad. I am beginning to love mankind *à la* Marat: to make the least part of it happy I would be willing to decimate the rest of it with fire and sword. What right has a man of my type to place himself above humanity, to divorce himself from it by means of an iron crown and purple robe which, as Schiller, the Tiberius Gracchus of our era, has said, are still stained with the blood of the first manslayer? What right has he to fill me with that awe which is but another form of degradation? Why must I bare my head before him? I feel that if I were a king I would most certainly turn into a tyrant. Only an omniscient and passionless God can be a Tsar. . . . Hegel dreamed of a constitutional monarchy as the ideal State—what a paltry conception! No, there should be no monarchs, for a monarch can never be a brother, always he will keep aloof from men even if only through empty etiquette, and men will always bow down to him if merely for form's sake. Men ought to be brothers and ought not to humiliate one another even by a shade of external and formal superiority. How gifted of the French to grasp without the help of German philosophy what German philosophy has still failed to understand! Damn it, I must study the Saint-Simonists! I look upon woman through their eyes. Woman is a victim, the slave of modern society. It is in the body rather than in the soul that public opinion lodges a woman's honor. . . .

III

St. Petersburg, September 8, 1841

. . . You know my nature: always it runs to extremes. . . .It is with difficulty and pain that I part from an old idea, but once I do so I renounce it utterly, attaching myself to the new one with the fanaticism of a proselyte. And so, I am now at a new extreme—it is the idea of *socialism* which has become for me the idea of ideas, the essence of being, the question of questions, the alpha and omega of belief and knowledge. It is at once the question and the answer. It has swallowed up for me history and religion and philosophy. Hence I am using it now to explain my existence and yours, and indeed that of everyone I have encountered on life's path. . . . Our most cherished (and rational) dream was to bring our lives, and our mutual relation as well, into some kind of viable contact

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with reality. Well, the dream was but a dream and such it remains; we were phantoms and will die as phantoms, yet we were not at fault and have nothing to blame ourselves for.

The Universal isolated from the particular and individual exists in pure thought alone; in vital, concrete, visible reality the Universal is but a lifeless masturbatory dream. Man is a grand word, a grand cause, but not man in general, only man as Frenchman, German, Englishman or Russian. Yet are we truly Russians? No, society looks upon us as diseased growths on its body, and we in turn regard society as a dungheap. Society is right, and we are even more in the right. . . . Without purpose no activity is possible, and without interests there is no purpose, and without activity no life; and it is the substance of social life which is the source of all three—interests, purpose and activity. Is that correct, logical, clear? We are men without a country—no, worse by far, we are men whose country is a phantom, and no wonder we are phantoms ourselves, that our friendship, our loves, and our doings and strivings are phantoms too. Botkin, you loved and your love came to nothing. It is likewise the story of my love. Stankevitch[3] was of a higher caliber than either of us, and that was his story too. No, we were not made for love, to be husbands and fathers of families. . . . There are people whose lives, lacking content, cannot take on form; we, on the other hand, are men with ample life-content for which society provides no given, settled forms. Outside our circle I have met excellent men of greater actuality than ourselves; but nowhere have I come upon men with such an insatiable thirst for life, with such enormous demands on it, and with such capacities for self-sacrifice for the sake of an idea. That is the cause of our appeal and of the disturbance our presence effects. . . . Looking for a way out, we threw ourselves with fervor into the alluring sphere of German philosophical contemplation, fancying that we could create a charming inner world full of light and warmth closing us off from the external environment. We did not understand that this contemplative subjectivism and inwardness comprised the objective interest of the German national character, that it is for the Germans what sociality is for the French. Reality roused us and opened our eyes, but for what? . . .

Social solidarity or death! That is my motto. What is it to me

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that the Universal exists when the personality is suffering? What care I if on earth the genius lives as in heaven when the mass is wallowing in dirt? What care I that *I* grasp the "Idea," that the world of ideas is open to me in art, religion and history, when I cannot share it with all those who should be my brothers in humanity, my brothers in Christ, but who in their ignorance are actually strangers and enemies? What is the felicity of the elect to me when most men do not even suspect its possibility? Away with felicity if it is granted to me as one out of a thousand! I will not have it so long as I cannot have it in common with my lesser brethren!

My heart bleeds as I watch the life of the masses. Grief, poignant grief overpowers me at the sight of the barefooted little boys playing knucklebones in the street, of the poor in their rags and tatters, of the drunken cab driver, of the soldier returning from duty, of the functionary hurrying along with his brief case under his arm, of the self-complacent officer and the proud magnate. As I give the soldier a penny I almost cry, and I run from the beggar whom I have given a penny as though I had done him an injury and am ashamed to listen to the sound of my own footsteps. And that is life: to sit in the street in rags, an idiotic expression on one's face, collecting pennies all day long to be spent on booze in the evenings—men see it and care not a whit! I don't know what is happening to me, but there are times when I gaze with unutterable anguish at a whore in the street; her senseless smile acknowledging her depravity lacerates my soul, all the more so if she is good-looking. Next door to me there lives a well-to-do official who has become so Europeanized that he sends his wife to the baths in a carriage; recently I learned that he smashed in her teeth and lips, that he kicked her, dragging her over the floor by the hair because the cream she had prepared for his coffee was not good enough; and she had borne this man six children, and whenever I meet her I feel so bad at the sight of her pale worn face on which tyranny has left its mark. On hearing this story I gnashed my teeth—to burn this blackguard over a slow fire seemed to me too easy a punishment, and I cursed my impotence at not being able to go and kill him like a dog. And that is society, built on rational principles, a manifestation of reality! And how many

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such families, such husbands are there! After all that what right has a man to lose himself in art, in knowledge?

I am bearing down harder and harder on all the substantial principles that bind the will of man to a creed! My God is negation! In history my heroes are the disrupters of the old—Luther, Voltaire, the Encyclopaedists, the terrorists, Byron (*Cain*), etc. Intelligence now stands higher with me than reason, and that is why I now prefer the blasphemies of Voltaire to the authority of religion, society, anything or anyone! I know that the Middle Ages were a great epoch; I understand the sacredness, the poetry, the grandeur of medieval religiosity; but I am more pleased with the eighteenth century, the age of religion's decline; in the Middle Ages heretics, freethinkers and witches were burned at the stake; in the eighteenth century the guillotine chopped off the heads of aristocrats, priests and other enemies of God, reason and humanity. And there will come a time—I ardently believe it—when no one will be burnt, no one beheaded, when the criminal pleading for death as his mercy and salvation will not be granted death, for life will be his punishment as death is now; when there will be no senseless forms and rites, no contracts and conditions binding the feelings, no duties and obligations, when will yields to love alone but never to will; when there will be no husbands and wives but only lovers, and when the mistress comes to her lover to tell him that she loves another he will answer: "I cannot be happy without you, I will suffer all my life, but go to the man you love." If through magnanimity she should wish to stay on with him, he will not accept her sacrifice but will say to her: "I want blessings, not sacrifices." Woman will not be the slave of society and of men but, like men, will freely follow her inclinations without losing her good name—that monstrosity of conventional notions. There will be no rich, no poor, neither kings nor subjects, but only men and brothers, and, at the word of the apostle Paul, Christ will give back his power to the Father, and Father-Reason will again hold sway, this time in a new heaven and over a new world. Don't think that I am being excessively rational: no, I do not repudiate the past, I do not repudiate history—I see in them an essential and rational development of the idea; I want the golden age, not the unconscious animal bliss of the past but one prepared by society, laws, marriage,

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in a word by everything that may have been necessary in its time but is now stupid and mean. . . . It is ridiculous to imagine that all this could happen of itself, merely with the passage of time, without violent upheavals, without bloodshed. Men are so witless that they must be forcibly led to happiness. What is the blood of thousands compared to the degradation and suffering of millions. Therefore: *fiat justitia, pereat mundus!*

(*Translated from the Russian by Philip Rahv*)

1. M. B. Zagoskin (1789-1852), Slavophil author of patriotic historical novels.
2. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was frequently referred to by the Russified nickname Yegor Fedorovitch in the circle of Moscow Hegelians in which Belinsky was first brought into contact with his philosophy.
3. N. V. Stankevitch (1813-1840), writer and student of philosophy, a close friend of Belinsky, who played a leading role in the so-called "idealist" Moscow circle of intellectuals.

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BOOKS

READERS' PRESCRIPTION

WRITING IN AMERICA. Edited by John Fischer and Robert B. Silvers. Rutgers. $3.95.

Only an age of accommodation and intellectual inconsequence could have nurtured this apparently harmonious chorus of singing birds, who are really, if they knew or cared to admit it, a very discordant choir. The book is a collection of essays (with minor additions) that appeared last year in a special supplement to *Harper's Magazine*. It is a slight production, having neither the weight and authority nor the historical perspective of the London *Times Literary Supplement* of 1954 called "American Writing Today." Nor does it have the concerted seriousness of a symposium like PR's "America and the Intellectuals" of some years ago. *Harper's* seems to have said, "Let's get a couple of highbrows, a solid core of middlebrows, and one lowbrow, throw them together and see what happens. As a lead-off piece we can use that stimulating and thought-provoking speech on the lack of persuasive ideas in contemporary literature, delivered by Mason Gross before the National Book Committee." But beginning with Mr. Gross, nothing very electrifying happens at all.

Everyone except Elizabeth Hardwick and Alfred Kazin is so *amiable*. And the only one who actually makes some sparks fly is Miss Hardwick. There isn't even an attack on "the critics" or the literary quarterlies. The formula for the supplement seems to have provided for no more than four articles on writing as writing—"The Alone Generation: A Comment on the Fiction of the Fifties" by Alfred Kazin, "Poetry's Silver Age: An Improbable Dialogue" by Stanley Kunitz, "Why American Plays Are Not Literature" by Robert Brustein, and "The Decline of Book Reviewing," by Miss Hardwick. With the exception of Mr. Kunitz's piece, which is most-

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ly a list of names interspersed with pleasant commentary and apt quotations, these are much the best essays of the collection. Mr. Kazin's piece is the only one in the book that has a real inner passion and intellectual power, although both Miss Hardwick and Mr. Brustein perform genuine intellectual acts. Kazin's main point about the novelists of the fifties may perhaps be fairly summed up by the following sentence: "Salinger's work is a perfect example of the lean reserves of the American writer who is reduced to 'personality,' even to the 'mystery of personality,' instead of the drama of our social existence." Brustein's point about the American drama is that it has impoverished itself intellectually and imaginatively by cutting itself off (as American poems and novels at their best have not) from literature (for language even), from the literary life, from literary tradition, and from the world of ideas. He has the same complaint about the contemporary Broadway theater that Kazin has about the novel of the fifties. There is no lack of "daring" themes in contemporary plays, but they are all psychological—dealing with "homosexuality, promiscuity, infidelity, incest"—and the real issues associated with these themes, although they are confronted by Americans every day outside the theater, are always "sentimentalized and evaded" on the stage.

Miss Hardwick has the temerity to attack *The New York Times Book Review,* along with *The Herald-Tribune Book Review* and *The Saturday Review.* Most people I know think the *Times Book Review* nowadays is either too magisterial or too irrelevant to attack. They are wrong, and Miss Hardwick has done a service by reminding us of all those people who are potentially valuable to the health of the literary life in this country and who innocently depend on the *Book Review* for literary opinion. "There comes to mind," Miss Hardwick says, "all those high-school English teachers, those faithful librarians and booksellers, those trusting suburbanites, those bright young men and women in the provinces, all those who believe in the judgment of the *Times* and who need its direction." The *Book Review* has slowly declined over the years to its present all-time low estate. It is not only that within its pages there reigns a "universal, if somewhat lobotomized, accommodation." What is basically wrong, as Miss Hardwick says, is the plain bad editing of the *Review.* The standard answer to such complaints is that the

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Review reaches between one and two million people and that therefore it is impossible to maintain too high an intellectual level or demand very much from the reader. There are many answers to this. One might start by pointing out that much of the reportage and commentary in other sections of the *Times* requires of its readers a higher level of intellectual competence and ability to understand the English language than does the *Book Review*.

But the formula of the *Harper's* Supplement called for the bulk of its contents to deal with the situation of the writer, rather than with writing iself. And so we have Kingsley Amis purporting to discuss what is expected of the writer in America when he gives a university lecture or participates in a public symposium. The symposium Mr. Amis talks about rather improbably consisted of James Wechsler, Ashley Montagu, Jack Kerouac, and himself. But Amis's piece, though amusing, is regrettably short; and he contents himself with complimenting Mr. Wechsler and reporting the disgusting antics of Kerouac. C. P. Snow amiably wonders whether the writer's situation is a happier one here or in England. He finally opts for England because of the coherent and serious audience the English writer knows he is writing for, in contrast to the shifting, elusive, unstable—or simply unknown—audience in this country and because of the fragmentation and alienation of our literary life. Budd Schulberg recounts his own experience of the situation of the writer in Hollywood, telling us how, in order to escape the stultifying effects of a Hollywood career, he cleared out, as an aspiring young author, for the East. But he thinks that the partial breakdown of the movie industry under the impact of TV has paradoxically somewhat retrieved the situation for the screen writer. The writer, he thinks, need no longer be the despised and humiliated menial of the great Hollywood days, but with luck can follow Mr. Schulberg's own example of literary integrity in a movie like "On the Waterfront." By contrast, Vance Bourjaily finds in "The Lost Art of Writing for Television" that after a brief period at the inception of TV it became virtually impossible to write serious drama specifically for that medium. I will leave it to the reader of *Writing in America* to discover the fascinating process by which Frank Yerby ("How and Why I Write the Costume Novel") studied up on *Tom Jones* and *Vanity Fair,* assessed the interior desires and frustrations of the po-

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tential (female) reader, and made himself a consistent place on the best-seller list. Nor have I any thoughts about the anonymous "Letter to a Young Man About to Enter Publishing"—except that it has nothing to do with writing in America.

John Fischer's piece called "Writers and Their Editors" strikes me as a bit of folklore out of the Romance of Editing. Mr. Fischer, though an editor of long standing and one who doubtless knows his business, seems to have been reading too much Tom (as he calls him) Wolfe. He describes the typical editor as a sort of long-suffering mother-father figure, a large part of whose destiny is to put up with authors' "tantrums and change their emotional diapers." Although ignorant about publishing, I'll hazard the guess that this isn't true. I don't know what to make of Fischer's assertion that the readers' reports to editors on unpublished manuscripts "are probably the best literary criticism being written anywhere." But I refuse to believe his quotation from *The New Yorker* to the effect that if the written editorial opinions of the late Wolcott Gibbs "could be released to the world (as they most assuredly can't be), they would make probably a funnier and sounder critique of creative writing in the late twenties and early thirties than has ever been assembled." This too sounds to me like folklore, of the sort believed in by the Ross-was-one-hell-of-an-editor school of literary theory. And unless reliably informed that Mr. Gibbs's editorial opinions are a whole lot funnier and sounder than his theater reviews in *The New Yorker* were, I'll settle for, among others, Edmund Wilson's critique of creative writing in the late twenties and early thirties.

Which reminds me that a look into *Shores of Light,* Mr. Wilson's chronicle of the writing of 30 years ago, shows us how much has been lost on the literary scene. Relatively at least there was a real coherence (as opposed to mere accommodation) of purpose and spirit among writers 30 years ago. And a book published in 1930 and called *Writing in America* could scarcely have helped being less shallow and haphazard than this one is.

Richard Chase

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AN EXCITING DISAPPOINTMENT

IN DEFENSE OF IGNORANCE. By Karl Shapiro. Random House. $4.00.

Criticism at its best is relaxed and generous—honest, intelligent and passionate response; its ultimate values and uses are by-products of this initial confrontation. But most contemporary critics have somehow lost sight of the essential simplicity of their craft, and substitute for it pretentious abstraction, pompus authority or a scholarship divorced from reaction. Lost in this zealous shuffle are the private and fundamental acts of response and judgment, the critic's only obligations. What criticism does present as judgment is usually a disguised and desperate metaphysical or political polemic—this is the common denominator of all New Criticism—and these opinions, passed down in toto and weighted with authority, became increasingly corrosive: the primary acts vanish, what should be spontaneous becomes packaged.

In Defense of Ignorance needs this introduction because Karl Shapiro is fretfully aware of this situation—my paragraph, I think, mirrors his attitude toward modern criticism—and it is within this framework that his book seems to me an exciting kind of disappointment. Exciting and disappointing—those are the two words I should choose. It is exciting because it is free of the critic's usual bombast and cant—a grotesque, brave and passionate book with all the failings critics have learned to avoid: commitment, risk and even contradiction. It is disappointing because it somehow fails to break into that enchanted country for which Shapiro aims; in its way it is a shrill and crippled book, and at times it seems almost hysterical.

I say this a little sadly, for it seems to me that Shapiro is on the right track here, though the track itself isn't as sparsely traveled as he appears to think. Impatient with the cultural establishment, these troubled essays, subjective and romantic, have excited the sympathies and sometimes the intelligence of many young writers and teachers I have questioned. Intended not to correct but to reinvigorate taste, they concentrate on the literary illusions of our time, and in so doing they complete Shapiro's public conversion,

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concretize ideas that have developed from his *Essay on Rime* (1945) through *Beyond Criticism* (1953) to these latest pieces:

It has taken me twenty years to break away completely from modern poetry and modern criticism. . . . Being a teacher has helped me immeasurably to see how pernicious this poetry and criticism really are. . . . Being an editor has helped me see . . . the essential dishonesty of the modern critic, the dearth of taste, the misuse of understanding. . . .

"Literary affectation," excessive abstraction and "the culture religion instituted by modern poetry" are among his main targets, and he eyes with skepticism the sacred cows of modern literature and their anxious keepers: Pound, Eliot, Auden and some of Yeats's projections. What is more, this literary tangle is artificial, manufactured, almost a hoax:

Eliot created a literary situation deliberately; he and his "situation" are fabrications. . . . Eliot invented a modern world which exists only in his version of it.

So much is true. There *is* a web of misconception and misrepresentation stretched across modern literature like a wordy snare, and it's *that* Shapiro wants broken. And it needs breaking, but Shapiro goes at his task without the necessary precision and care. These essays against the cyclopean shadows are nervous, excited; Shapiro knows what he dislikes about them but he confuses the complex of historical relationships—Eliot is sometimes a malicious conjuror, sometimes an agonized victim—and his attempts to trace the intellectual "dry-rot" of the age are muddled and repetitious, the elements of cause and effect often confused. All of this, of course, might be excused as vehement polemic, but as polemic it is distorted by Shapiro's arguments with himself, the running, irregular record of his conversion; he was, as he himself points out, long under Eliot's wing. And as polemic these essays are inferior to the battles others have staged with the same figures: Robert Graves's essays in *The Saturday Review,* for instance, were far more effective, if I remember correctly; F. R. Leavis's essay in *Commentary* (Nov. 1958), a detailed dissection of Eliot's criticism, was more damaging because of its documented care.

For there is about these essays a strained naivete, a forced and cumbersome innocence. I don't know if Shapiro is actually an ama-

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teur in the world of ideas or if that is part of his pose as an "anti-intellectual"; it really doesn't matter. What does is the unquestioning enthusiasm of his Alice-in-Wonderland crushes, his headlong rush from Bucke's cosmic consciousness to Reich to Hassidism to Blavatsky to Zen to Jung—without a breath, without examination. The "anti-ascetic and joyous" is what Shapiro celebrates, and we need its celebration, but its handling here is more than relaxed—it is fuzzy and superficial, occasionally sophomoric. Religion and mysticism are lived traditions, disciplines, whether Zen or Hassidic; they are convincing when they flower into poems, not when presented as happy literary platforms, not even when their advocate has such good intentions. Elsewhere in his book Shapiro takes Yeats to task for his tortured straining after the occult, and this is precisely the feeling he generates himself: a continual straining after the divine, almost desperate at times: an effort to take joy by storm.

I suppose this sounds ungrateful; there *is* much scattered in these essays which is incisive and exciting. In places the troubled, engaged and personal voice breaks through, sure of itself, and what follows is unusual and useful. It is this voice which illuminates the final essays in the collection, those in which Shapiro takes up new heroes to replace the old. They are those writers who seem to have moved their readers and younger writers far more and in different ways than their public critics: Williams, Henry Miller, Whitman, Dylan Thomas, Hart Crane: the eccentric, the celebratory, the apocalyptic—the passionate human voices. Shapiro confronts them all with a sincerity and joyous friendship in keeping with the qualities he praises: the essay on Miller, for example, is marvelous, strikes just the right balance of thought, affection and humor. It is response without pretense to authority or affectation, and its honesty is its justification. Freely playing, these qualities bring to life Shapiro's assertions: that beneath the involuted complexity of theory we are pained and joyful creatures—writer, reader and critic alike; that the rock-bottom essential in poetry *or* criticism is the passionate honesty of the personal voice.

As for the rest of the book and those uneasy essays: if they *are* the fretful record of conversion they seem, they may be the necessary prose approach to Shapiro's future poems.

Peter Marin

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THE DARK
AND THE LIGHT
Elio Vittorini

BEHAVIOR
OF TITANS
Thomas Merton

HER
Lawrence Ferlinghetti

THE LIME TWIG
John Hawkes

WISDOM
OF THE DESERT
Thomas Merton

MARCO POLO
Maurice Collis

GAUDIER-BRZESKA,
A Memoir
Ezra Pound

CAN THESE
BONES LIVE
Edward Dahlberg

LAUGHTER
IN THE DARK
Vladimir Nabokov

Also ND PAPERBOOKS
Merton, Miller, Empson

NEW DIRECTIONS

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PLUG, PROJECT, REPEAT

THE HAPPY BIRTHDAY OF DEATH. By Gregory Corso. New Directions. $1.20.

I listened about a year ago, on the British Broadcasting Corporation's Third Programme, to a dialogue between either Ginsberg or Corso, I forget which, and an old acquaintance of mine, now in the United States, Donald Carne-Ross. Carne-Ross looks rather like Sherlock Holmes, and has a gimlet-like intelligence; on this occasion, he was using it to bore holes in the sea. Carne-Ross is not what I would call a kindly man, but in England the tender side of his nature used to come out in keeping, in his rather shabby rooms in Earl's Court, a pet rat. His crisp, brisk, biscuity English voice offered, however, no crumbs of comfort to Ginsberg or Corso. The Beatnik soliloquy just went on and on, throbbing with a growing admiration and pity and love of itself, and when Carne-Ross did, once in five minutes, manage to break the flow with, "It does, *rather,* seem to me *that* . . ." the terrible flux would drown the dependent-noun clause, the relentless voice of Ginsberg or Corso would cry: "Don't break into what I'm saying."

It was not an interview, in other words, it was abreaction: Carne-Ross ought not to have been the critic, "the questioner who sits so sly," but the psychiatrist lying as exhausted on his companion couch (the flow of abreactive words was very exhausting) as his patient. The effect of exposing yourself full, bang on, to Ginsberg or Corso is in fact like the effect (which I have suffered) of letting a manic-depressive friend slowly exhaust all your constructive and helpful responses in the depressive phase. You reach a point where you scream, "All right, why *don't* you go and kill yourself?" and the friend, having secured a temporary breakdown of your *bourgeois* smugness, feels a little better. Corso's verse seems to me to show more talent than Ginsberg's, and he conducts his war against adjustment, moderation, the objective view, and what have you, with a passionate single-mindedness that is in some ways admirable. He is very cruelly whipping the same set of obsessions round and round the same ring, but the words do prance sometimes, and he cracks the whip stylishly. It is difficult, however, to criticize the

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poems as poems, in any old-fashioned sense. The long poem, *Bomb,* is shock-tactics, reminding one of Marinetti (the bombs in Ethiopia, flowering on the ground like great red roses, brown bodies frizzling at the edge of the petals) and partly of very smart advertisement copy writing; plug, project, repeat are, I would say, Corso's aesthetic rules. The deep psychological technique of adjustment is the White Queen's: scream all the time before it happens, and then what happens will be an anticlimax, which you can take quite calmly. I think it was the White Queen who also told Alice that you have to run very hard to stay in one place, and this I think Corso is doing. The revealing bits are where some "poetry" in an old sense creeps in, and seems often touchingly soft-centered:

Often, in some steep ancestral book,
when I find myself entangled with leopard-apples and torched mushrooms,
my cypressean skin outreaches the recorded age
and I, as though tipping a pitcher of milk,
pour secrecy upon the dying page.

Some ear there, some sense of the shaping of a stanza: or. . . .

Men! let's bypass the city let us fly let us go jet
until we crash safely into snow from huge pink foundations—
gentle children await us.

The troubling thing with Mr. Corso is that he is such a Charles Addams character one doesn't quite know what he is going to do with these gentle children when he meets them. Rescue them, nourish them, comfort them? Boil them in a cannibal stew? The powerful, wobbly, eructative emotions of a volume like this seem above all eminently *exploitable* by men with harder heads, worse hearts and sharper purposes than Mr. Corso. Richards thought what a good reading of a good poem should do is leave you more open and alert for what happens next; I feel that full surrender to Mr. Corso (which I admit I have avoided, however) would leave you flat on your back waiting for elephants to trample on you. But I would by no means say there is no talent here, or that the individual has not a right to organize his suffering as a machine of self-projection and symbolic psychic aggression. One says, "Good, he is getting it out of his system!" And one's own system, as the defenses are one by one torn away, must take its chances.

G. S. Fraser

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FICTION CHRONICLE

THE DOUBLE VIEW. By Chandler Brossard. Dial. $3.50.
THE HOUSE OF FIVE TALENTS. By Louis Auchincloss. Houghton Mifflin. $4.50.
THE INHABITANTS. By Julius Horwitz. World. $4.00.
CEREMONY IN LONE TREE. By Wright Morris. Atheneum. $4.00.

A character in Chandler Brossard's new book remarks in a discursive moment that "the American upper middle class isn't *being* destroyed, it's destroying itself." He explains the remark:

You can only exist in so far as you function, function spontaneously, organically. In other words, *react*. All right. The upper middle class in this country doesn't do these things. By now they live so exclusively by formula, and by preconceived patterns, that they are in effect merely somnambulists, or robots, or, as I said, corpses. . . . Even their speech has become pure gibberish. It's an argot of completely esoteric, arbitrary symbols, clichés, and vocal nuances, utterly removed from contemporary reality.

The familiarity of these assertions does not lessen their truth, which is too heavy with what are still called human consequences to be ground at once in the mill of critical abstraction. Doubtless the people in question are largely oblivious to their situation, yet all pay a penalty of non-being at which only obliviousness or cruelty itself can shrug.

But after refusing to shrug, or to pretend to classy remoteness from the speech in question, abstraction can decently remind itself that the situation constitutes a literary problem as well as a public agony. When middle to upper-middlebrow speech and gestures become clichés, when the possibility of achieving unique styles of behavior at the standard novelistic level vanishes, writers must respond in some fashion. And not only American writers. Elizabeth Bowen used to let it fall, ten years ago when she was still visiting American colleges regularly, tightening her grip on Ivy steps, that she liked to write about people of a certain position in life, types "who had enough money to allow them to think of self-expression in their own forms." But it has been more than a decade since this writer has addressed herself (in fiction) to London, and the best London novels in that period have been either "historical" or about

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Trinidadians who call a job a "work." The case is that the middle of life (Brossard's "upper" is anachronistic) is everywhere disappearing as a resource for fiction, as an object to be taken seriously. The imaginative writer who seeks to comment on this level of life —it is, after all, the experience most people believe they know best —must communicate an awareness that what he is dealing with does not resemble a level of life so much as it does a dandelion in a dung hill. And the writer who seeks to create urban experience of genuine substance and freshness is obliged to avoid it altogether.

The Double View, to return to Mr. Bossard, is not quite bare. of middling level (or better) social detail. Chicken creole and a gold leaf clock, Scotch and soda, a Packard convertible, and volunteer work for the Spanish refugees turn up in its pages. The details mentioned, though, are darts of contempt (the target is the expensive hide of a posh *voyeuse*), not furnishings of a familiar world. The society of the tony lady who has a Sargeant of Granny on her wall is at first limited to hoods and whores, and it widens with the book only to take in Village types—Negro professors, hospitalized paranoiacs, hipsterish admen, jobless Jewish writers and assorted reviewers and partygivers. In short this novelist, whose idea of Uptown at the beginning of his career was the Garden, is still staring hardest at the déclassé.

What he sees are multiple guises, self-deceit, the hell of superconsciousness, and the impossibility of human connection. The style of his reporting is rapid and crisp (about a pompous party-sociologist it is said that "he uses language as a means of excommunication"). And his intelligence has a blade. Offered a choice between liberal platitudes and hipster soulmaking he chooses neither. He allows his thoughtful adman, a believer in "exploiting schizophrenia" who by night guns with a mob, to spell out a program of self-help:

> . . . your philosophy of niceness. It isn't relevant to modern life. Niceness is sick, neurotic, and not, as you seem to think, "human". . . . Instead of destroying yourself with anxiety by repressing certain aspects of your whole self, aspects that conflict with the so-called moral self, why, it would be better to try to express them all. For example, if you have some criminal desires, become a part-time thief, or at least let the emotion have some badly needed exercise. See what I mean?

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And he painstakingly creates this figure's characteristic satisfactions and gestures— among them a "swoon" at the passion of a whore who, shown a gun, "stared at its hard beauty, gently stroked its smooth barrel, and then, closing her eyes, kissed it, as the others watched in silent amazement." But the explosion at the end of the book shreds the programmatic adman as well as the hypocritical socialite and other super-conscious cats, and the voice that recounts the event does not quiver with positive regret.

To work the themes of the madman-poet-saint with poise and without bogus intensity is an achievement—yet *The Double View* is less than a thoroughly impressive book. The reason for this is not obscure. Setting out to avoid the most familiar clichés—The Alligator Belt of America, as it were—Brossard arrives only in a world of less familiar clichés. And since he is a sophisticated man, he has no choice except to toot an ironical horn at these stranger sights. Contemptuous of the "soft" enlightenment as well as of the perpetual identity-maundering of his central characters, he seeks toward the end to elevate a trucker's helper turned hood—on the ground that the latter is no "dillier with identities, no dallier with self, a single dealer of infinite simplicity." But the tone of the effort is that of a man who is simply bored with the old crowd. (Other evidence of boredom is the nervousness of the writer's eye—nothing here, try there; nothing there, try elsewhere. . . .) As it turns out, the matter of the grey, half-hipsterish, half-responsible world is as lifeless, as impossible to transform into experience, as that of the world which is to be "avoided altogether." It is true that Mailer, who has pointed out the resemblance between his own preoccupations and Brossard's, finds stimulants to hatred and passion in the world mentioned that may, when fully defined, dignify the place as representative chaos. But this in no way alters the fact that Brossard's findings rouse him only to contained mockery.

As *The New Yorker* explained, *The House of Five Talents* is Louis Auchincloss's attempt to provide evidence for the claim made about him for years, namely that he is a man who likes to write about the very rich. His contention that this claim has rested on flimsy ground is indisputable, for the focus of his work has more often been on an accepted middle or even professional style (of ambition, integrity, fidelity, infidelity, or the like) than upon the

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high life pure and plain that originally brought him reputation. Indeed, one reason that some observers have hesitated to praise him is that, as his career has developed from *The Injustice Collectors,* he has seemed steadily more inclined to share the obliviousness implicit in these styles. The professionals of *Timothy Colt* and *Pursuit of the Prodigal* (even of *Venus in Sparta*) drown in the middle swim, true, but the personal disasters remain personal—as though the writer knew of no relation between them and the sickness of a class (or the advent of life "by formula and by preconceived pattern"), or else were simply interested in imagining what the present order of feeling, interests and self-definitions would be, had the age been free of apocalyptic events. The books mentioned, like most of what Auchincloss has written, have been finished with care and elegance that in themselves stood as a repudiation of the over-familiar middle matter set forth in them. But, to repeat, this was the only obvious repudiation, and it has not always seemed sufficient.

The House of Five Talents appears at the outset to be open to no such objection. Its announced subject is not the highminded conventionalist in a law factory but five generations of one of the country's great fortunes. And Auchincloss is at pains to establish that his spokesman, a spiky old maid of seventy-five whose grandfather built the fortune chronicled, is above all an enemy of limp middleness—an eye that can place the latter not on an abstract sociologizing scale but as evidence of a decline from an ideal of substance fully alive in her mind. In the opening pages Augusta Millinder has at the new "democratic rich" who, abdicating from their responsibility to invent styles of life that everyone can admire, take up conventional middle positions for conventional "worthy" reasons. ("Alfred loves to be described in picture magazines as a 'daring collector' and to be photographed in his shirt sleeves, pipe in hand, squinting at some practical joke by Picasso that he has just bought at a higher price than my mother paid for her great Holbein. It's all part and parcel of his silly campaign to identify the family name with something he calls 'public responsibility.' ") She asks with fine nastiness, "Why should we care what the name stands for?" and asserts that at the heart of modish liberalism stands the belief not that all men are equal but that "all men are the same."

Regrettably, though, the ideal of substance against which these

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"somnambulists or robots" of middle life are measured is virtually worthless as a scale. After dissociating herself from the dumb leveller of the present moment, Miss Millinder turns back with restrained enthusiasm to the dumb snob of the past: to Newport and to famous wars of vulgarity and "heroic" episodes of repression that not even a balanced view can satisfactorily link with the good and the true. As the book progresses the standards of her judgment come to seem increasingly lax, fatuous, and indicative of nothing but blank pre-Flood superstition:

> The Havens were old New Yorkers, but not the kind who had allowed themselves to tumble into a pedigree-worshiping, servant-distrusting brownstone meanness. Like all true epicures, they had kept up with the times. If a Haven had been at Valley Forge and a Haven at Gettysburg, a Haven had also been president of the Erie Railway and a Haven had married a Vanderbilt. It was a family on a minor scale like the Adams family, associated with every chapter of American history, yet always standing quite voluntarily a bit to the side, a bit aloof. I have never known how to grade the various tiers of New York society—I leave that to the gossip writers—but I venture to say that a shrewd social climber would have given more to be invited to the Collier Havens' than to any other house in the city . . . I went there myself but once a year. . . .

The mind that slides over "minor scale" is plainly no instrument to trust. And before the end of the book its edge has nearly disappeared, as is evident in these chiding words addressed to a nephew who thinks of dropping football for poetry:

> If you spend next fall with a pad and pencil under the elm trees, instead of down on that football field with your friends where you belong, only one good poem will come out of it. And do you know what that poem will be? . . . A dramatic monologue by the boy who let down his team to write it.

As a fling into downrightness and team-ism this lecture, and its triumphant sequel ("As it turned out, his forward passes were as vital to the team as I had been led to believe, and Chelton won all its outside games"), are doubtless tougher than the attitudes of adjustment and public responsibility teased at the beginning, but they are not one whit less flat.

Writers of first person books, as everyone knows, often establish ironic distance between themselves and their spokesmen. And it is

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possible that if the author of *The House of Five Talents* had attempted something of the sort with his narrator, he might have made her into a force—a monument to virtue and cant, a fossilic survival of interest for prominence of elbows and knees. That he has made no attempt in this line signifies an absence of disturbance at the descent from the ideal that can reasonably be regarded as complacent. Auchincloss has found a figure on whom to center his affection, and as a consequence his book is at moments touching, but he has not really risen above the somnambulant middle consumer. His book is, in sum, a disappointment. Its project of distinguishing the heroic past from the measly present (at the end, "in the downy bed of more romantic concepts," the Newport titans are transformed into Renaissance princes and queens) issues only in withered stereotypes: The Vulgar Climber, The "Poor" But Tasteful Social Arbiter, The Commie Heir. And of them all the spiky old maid of such promise turns out at last to be chief.

There are few if any stereotypes in Julius Horwitz's *The Inhabitants* and almost no allusions to the common middle world. The book is about people living on city welfare checks in Broadway and 104th Street "hotels"; its events, to sanitize them in a word, are recounted by an un-brutalized caseworker who seeks to organize the chaos of his own responses by centering passion and hope on a single casualty (a girl with a fatherless child). The failure of this contention against meaninglessness by action seems neither more nor less inevitable than the failures elsewhere in the book to arrive at a principle of order by thought. Roaches and filth, addiction and senility, rape and prolicide, the eye of the rat and the eyes of abandoned children left to make meals on liverwurst and marshmallow cookies—where in all this would order be found? Not, as the caseworker discovers, in the routine of official giving. The man numbs himself for a moment with lists ("Anybody else could give the girl talk. You'll be surprised by what I could give her. Let me itemize: 8 milk bottles [Pyrex], 2 4-ounce bottles, 12 nipples, 10 nipple caps . . ."), but the paralyzing questions return: "Why was this girl born? How does she live? How will she die?" The myth that somewhere in the million vomit-sour rooms lies a great soul to be saved allays no perturbation—for no one will be saved. The possibility that familiarity with ugliness will in the end diminish its

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power to shake the heart cannot be trusted: every effort to describe the commonplace in commonplace tone is ruined by some unpredictable splinter of rage ("The cry of being human was the most commonplace cry in Service. I heard it daily. It's the spatial cry of the beggar. Look the next time you see a beggar. The successful beggar always suggests he too is human. I don't know why we should have beggars. But beggars beg you to look on their face. Almost like the anger of a god.")

The desperation of this voice, as is clear, is that of the man whose life is a nightmare of impotency, and it lifts the novel at hand well above the level of the treatise on urban blight. That despite this elevation the book falls short of coherence, that Mr. Horwitz cannot make art out of his truths, his observation, his choked effort to reflect and to formulate, is a comment not on his talent but on the immensity of the disorder that he confronts. Mastery of the disorder (and of the uncontrollable potencies that leer through it) cannot be asked for; consciousness of it is, even when close to hysteria, as in *The Inhabitants,* an item to be prized.

That Wright Morris has a measure of this consciousness seems at first glance doubtful. The Nebraska plains and towns where much of his fiction is situated have little of the capacity of metropolis for suggesting the uncontrollable. On those occasions (*The Deep Sleep* or *Man and Boy* are examples) when Morris approaches the city, he does so only to concentrate on middle figures whose awareness of crisis ranges from minimal to non-existent. And as for his voice: it is invariably relaxed, wry, patient. "Come to the window," his new book says quietly as it opens:

> The one at the rear of the Lone Tree Hotel. The view is to the west. There is no obstruction but the sky. Although there is no one outside to look in, the yellow blind is drawn low at the window, and between it and the pane a fly is trapped. He has stopped buzzing. Only the crawling shadow can be seen. Before the whistle of the train is heard the loose pane rattles like a simmering pot, then stops, as if pressed by a hand, as the train goes past. The blind sucks inward and the dangling cord drags in the dust on the sill.

The tranquility of tone, the care of the composition, the evident desire to make even the most trivial event *occur*—these seem to stand in themselves for a total withdrawal from urgency.

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Yet Morris's evocation of middleness, rural and other, has from the beginning had its allusion to ominousness, its hints of monster crabs seething noiseless and invisible in clipped, rose-bordered lawns. The suggestion of comical wars of nature is less misleading than might be thought. A notion of what surrounds and destroys the homely old objects of the Nebraska scene is brilliantly (and modestly) set forth in the jacket design of *Ceremony in Lone Tree*—red, brutal, bladelike wedges thrown down on the weathery wood spokes of a cart wheel. (The design is the work of Harry Ford.) But in Morris's writing the hum of the machine of otherness, incomprehensibility, seems in its subtle pervasiveness more like nature than nature itself, an encompassing, un-isolatable, half-comic force. The novel at hand, like *The Works of Love* and parts of *The Field of Vision,* is an ironic celebration of Scanlon, a 90 year old plainsman who knew Buffalo Bill. Newspaper agitation issues in a birthday celebration for the old man in a ghost town—an affair to which his family returns from suburbs everywhere in the land. The book is told in Morris's usual manner: a long view of the empty way station where the party is to be held; a series of static, more or less undramatized, shifts from consciousness to consciousness; and then one "galvanizing" event—an effort to enliven the ceremony that kills the pioneer with a paroxysm of joy.

There is more comic invention in this tale than in anything its author has done before—but the hilarity conceals neither the disabilities of the celebrants nor the elements of culture that are responsible for them. Boyd, a writer who left town young, is a self-acknowledged cripple; the impotency of the others is revealed indirectly. McKee, the plainsman's son-in-law, sits in his garage reading the paper outwardly "undisturbed," but inwardly trembling at the ferocity of the new youth (GIRLS KIDNAP HUMBOLDT FARMER). "Where did they come from? Were they born the way normal children were born? What troubled [him] was . . . the knowledge that nothing he could say or do would ever change their belief that he was their mortal enemy. Every time [he] entered a corner drugstore or blinked his eyes in a movie lobby he saw these youngsters gazing at him with their sightless eyes." McKee's wife, the plainsman's daughter, cannot believe in her own reality except when she is fumbling a grown grandson who terrorizes her. One of

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the plainsman's older great grandsons, Lee Roy Momeyer, works in a garage (it bears a sign that announces: "HAVE GUNS—WILL LUBRICATE") and shoots his grease gun at college boys who come too close to the pit, or uses it to "pin the flies to the wall. . . ." The sister of this figure, Etoile (Eee-toal) Momeyer, the plainsman's great granddaughter, keeps a card file on bust development ("Under Jayne Mansfield Etoile had written, *Not so hot*"). The father of the two, another of the plainsman's sons-in-law, is a postman who reads *Popular Mechanics* half the night, spends years working on a self-filling fountain pen, drives an old Fire Department Hupmobile with a dead red bulb on its roof, comes home daily from his route to "pick and dress half a dozen chickens," and then "goes off with his bow and arrow . . . until dark." Nor are the other inheritors of the past less sick or less mad.

It is said of their creator that he is the darling of the Litry—and *Ceremony in Lone Tree* does show signs, like Morris's earlier books, that he has read other writers beside himself, including Faulkner and perhaps even Nabokov (Morris is the latter's equal or superior on the subject of The American Road). It is also said of him that his people are weightless and insignificant, and as the foregoing catalogue indicates, the charge is just: Bud Momeyer the postman stirs only laughter, the burial procession of the quasi-heroic Westerner stirs only the sense of pathos—there are no giants on this writer's plains. The defense of Morris need not rest, however (as it has done in the past), entirely on his wit, or on his power to create out of emptiness a living scene, or even on his eye for such boondocks of the age as the castrating Female. His strongest claim is that alone among American writers he has an intuitive sense of the present quality of that life of the middle that has been spoken of here: a sense of waves of *kitsch,* buried Calvinism, bogus hatred (of the city), bogus love (for the tough old mountain men, The Pioneers), fear of the bomb and disbelief in the bomb that now torment and now titillate the millions who still sit on kitchen chairs instead of on kitchen bar stools, who still play pinochle on Wednesday nights, who still think they themselves are bringing up their children. His accomplishment is that of persuading his reader that the doom of these characters is not different from, nor less a matter to be soberly felt than, the ruin of Village speech, the decay

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of Bar Harbor, or even (extravagant as it appears to say) the misery of 104th Street. It is probably fair to ask whether the present middle culture ought not to yield something better than a letter-carrying Robin Hood, and it is possible that the man who answers with a violent affirmative is a genius rather than merely another somnambulist "utterly removed from contemporary reality." But the possibility is hardly vivid enough to discourage a firm impulse of gratitude for the singer of Lone Tree. He is less than Tolstoy like many others, but he is alive, and were it not for what he has snatched from the Chiclet-dripping jaws of our hell, the Schooner State, these faint visions of real buffalo on real plains, and all trustworthy trace of the vanishing, self-destroying class might even now have disappeared.

Benjamin DeMott

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VARIETY

THE CONVERSION OF THE JEWS

For a writer in his late twenties, writing almost exclusively about Jewish subjects, Philip Roth has had an unusual success. Amid general acclaim, he has won a Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship, the 1958 Aga Khan Prize for Fiction, and, most recently, the National Book Award, which designates *Goodbye, Columbus* as the best American fiction published during 1959.

One could discredit much of this applause—the Aga Khan, for example, on the grounds that Jewishness is the latest thing in Harvard literary circles. Yet the quality of Mr. Roth's writing has been attested to by two expert Jewish critics —Irving Howe and Alfred Kazin, and by our most highly-praised Jewish novelist, Saul Bellow.[1] Each of these knowledgeable men verifies Roth's portrait of the Jewish upper-middle class and sets forth qualified but positive claims for his merits as a novelist. I think they are mistaken on both counts, and that their mistake is grounded in a basic ignorance of the people Roth writes about.

All three of Mr. Roth's distinguished supporters correctly identify the major force behind his novel as an indictment of the Jewish upper-middle class —that large body of Jews who have made it to the top as merchants and professional men. Mr. Howe puts the matter nicely:

> The best parts of *Goodbye, Columbus,* done with a dead-pan malicious accuracy, are those in which Mr. Roth sketches the manners and morals of the Patimkins. . . .
>
> Mr. Roth skillfully—I suppose the word had better be, ruthlessly — charts the varieties of amiable vulgarity, *arriviste* snobbism and sheer mindlessness. . . .
>
> To the uninformed reader all of this might seem to verge on caricature, but I think it is ferociously exact. . . .
>
> If one is to object to these stories on non-literary grounds, out of a concern for the feelings or reputation of middle class American Jews, it can be done only by charging that, in effect, Mr. **Roth is a liar. And that,** I am convinced, he is not.

But Mr. Roth *is,* in the

1. In *The New Republic,* June 15, 1959; *The Reporter,* May 28, 1959; and *Commentary,* May, 1959, respectively.

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literary sense, a liar. I say so not out of concern for middle-class Jewry, but on the most literary grounds. Any novel is a lie unless it can tell some truth of the human heart. Roth, however, seeks only to cheapen the people he writes about. This motive is betrayed both by his selection of detail and by the kind of action that goes into his plots. The direct effect of his literary technique is to reduce the people he is describing to morons. Morons, of course, are easier to write about insofar as simple actions lend themselves most readily to moral judgment. Granted that a novelist has a right to create his own distorted world; still, we must demand of him that his distortions give us insight into the world we know. Roth is so eager to press for his judgment that his distortions are simply a matter of form and convenience—i.e., false art.

I think most of us share Mr. Roth's general conviction that the blatant materialism of the Jewish newly-rich is vulgar and destructive of human values. But to attack—even to lampoon—this materialism in terms that are convincing, the novelist is obliged to convey an accurate picture of what the Jewish upper-middle-class world is like. Roth does not come close to this accomplishment; an "informed

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reader" can easily correct him on many details crucial to the accuracy, and hence to the aesthetic success, of his novel. For example:

1. The central family of the novel, the Patimkins of Patimkin Sink, are passionately *athletic*. Yet, as any decent sportswriter will tell you, athletics are not a favorite vehicle of the upper-middle class, but rather of *lower* classes on the move upwards. To illustrate, Jewish athletes were most prominent in the 30's and earlier, while lately more and more champions have come from the Negro population. Patimkin & family would be likely to have *cultural* affectations—they would sponsor the Newark Symphony, travel to Europe, press expensive educations on their children, and perhaps even encourage their son to become a college professor. So all the scenes in which Roth dwells upon the limitless activities and paraphernalia of the Patimkins—in tennis, basketball, golf, football, swimming, etc. — are gratuitous, and have nothing to do with the Jewishness or the wealth of the people he is describing.

2. Brenda Patimkin, who so conclusively captivates the undertrodden Neil Klugman, is made out to be a Radcliffe girl. While it is probable enough that Patimkin Sink would want to send his daughter to Radcliffe, Miss Patimkin's behavior betrays not the slightest hint of her alma mater. Radcliffe girls are usually intelligent — or at least sophisticated. Among them one could find grinds, dilettantes, bohemians, snobs, etc.— but nary a one aspiring to All-American Girlhood. And yet Brenda Patimkin is characterized as a round-the-clock athlete who is absorbed exclusively in sex and clothes and who wouldn't dream of questioning her parents' values. She might just as well be a California "wasp" attending Los Angeles Junior College. Then, at any rate, it might not be so difficult to imagine her insisting that her boyfriend run round a track with her. Apparently Radcliffe closes some symbolic circuits for Mr. Roth, but all it does for his novel is to provide Neil Klugman, when all is lost, with the desire to throw a stone through the window of Lamont Library.

3. Mrs. Patimkin, Brenda's mother, who once had "the best backhand in the state of New Jersey," is an avid member of Hadassah, an organization which draws its membership mostly from lower-middle-class Jews. A country club woman would more likely belong to the Council of Jewish Women, or — better still — the

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League of Women Voters, or—best of all—a Wednesday bridge club. As if to compound her incongruity, Mrs. Patimkin is made to lecture Neil on the l a p s i n g Jewishness of the younger generation. She herself is Orthodox. This is a patent absurdity: a woman of Mrs. Patimkin's position would be lukewarm-Reform, and not only that, a rabid assimilationist. Mr. Roth has a perfect right to portray an eccentric; but to imply that the eccentric is typical is to take great liberties with the truth.

These three examples will give some notion of the general trend of Roth's distortions. Notice that in every case he simplifies his material, making the people he describes seem weaker and more ridiculous than they really are. The unfortunate truth is that Roth, while adroitly spinning an allegory of the classes, has overlooked genuine sources of drama in the lives of the people he is supposedly writing about. Although his admirers claim that he presents a fresh perspective on the Jewish social climb, Roth is terribly old-fashioned. His concern with the European theme of never-the-twain-shall-meet is inappropriate to the real problem of the children of the r i s e n Jewry: the typically American problem of *freedom.*

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The twain *does* meet—poor Jewish boys *do* marry rich Jewish girls; but after the marriage they don't know what to do with themselves. While their fathers were necessarily absorbed in the struggle to raise their families above the pariah style of life which confronted immigrant minorities, the children find this problem solved, and no longer challenging. The brightest of them have no desire to enter the family business, and often the family doesn't really expect it of them. They are the ones who must achieve something important in terms of the American community-at-large. The successful Jewish family is willing to provide its children with lavish educations, send them to Europe, prod them with lessons, tutors and bribes, hoping that they will develop into scientists, doctors, engineers, or professors. The children respond to this pressure as individuals, choosing and re-choosing and not-choosing among the various pains of freedom. Not the least of their problems is that they reject the values of their parents along with their occupations, and suffer in consequence from a schizoid distrust of the very things they are accustomed to need. Sooner or later, most of them sell out to their need for material comforts; others never do. But the process makes them entirely more complicated and devious than Mr. Roth would have them — fine subjects, indeed, for a novelist of insight and compassion.

In view of the preceeding corrections, it is hard to understand Irving Howe's business about how the uninformed reader might find *Goodbye, Columbus* a caricature, but to him it is all ferociously exact. Nor Saul Bellow's exhortation to keep up the good work. Apparently Howe and Kazin and Bellow accept without question the accuracy of Roth's portraiture. But when one thinks of it, why should they know the world Roth is ostensibly describing? All of them are non-bourgeois intellectuals who have made their careers in literary and academic circles. The people I'm talking about are merely their students.

Once the setting of *Goodbye, Columbus* is seen to be artificial, the plot, too, appears contrived and trivial. Alfred Kazin, however, describes it as the story of "a romantic and credulous youth defeated in love by a brutally materialistic society, like Fitzgerald's Gatsby." The comparison is far-fetched. Gatsby's fate is moving because Gatsby is noble, fantastic, creative; Neil Klugman is only a symbol. Whereas the structure

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of *The Great Gatsby* is focused on the fabulous mysteries of Gatsby's personality, *Goodbye, Columbus* flounders in a vacuum; for Neil Klugman is emotionally bankrupt. The only positive sensation he is capable of is the physical pleasure of luxuriating; as for his personal relations, he despises every other character in the book. Yet Mr. Kazin is so impressed with Neil that he centers his elaboration of the action around Neil's "love" and "dignity":

> When Brenda, perhaps unconsciously, allows her mother to discover that she has been sleeping with Neil so that the family itself can decisively end the romance, the betrayal is felt by Neil as a betrayal not only of his love but of his dignity as a human being who comes from the slums.

This account simply doesn't tally with the book. First of all, Neil Klugman is shown to feel no "dignity as a human being who comes from the slums." As a matter of fact, he's ashamed of it. The novel's sole representative of Neil's lower class Jewish background is his Aunt Gladys, who is ridiculed every time she appears, chiefly for her obsessive dread of food spoiling in the refrigerator. (Neil's parents are his characters, he rapidly brushes a brittle surface of

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conveniently missing; they are asthmatic, and so, as Neil puts it, "the two of them went wheezing off to Arizona.") Furthermore, Kazin is not accurate in placing the entire blame for Mrs. Patimkin's discovery on Brenda. Mrs. Patimkin uncovers the affair through chancing upon the diaphragm which Neil himself had insisted Brenda buy. Finally, it is not the family who break up the romance; it is Neil himself who tries to force complete responsibility on Brenda, and who walks out when she won't accept it. Clearly there is more than ample evidence that Neil has a hand in his own disaster; his is not a mere "betrayal." In fact, there is nothing to betray: Neil is nothing more than the allegorical Poor Boy. He is never assigned the slightest ambition, interest or sentiment that might give him credence as a full-bodied character: he does not seem to exist outside of his frustration with the Patimkins.

Setting aside the fact that one can't care about Neil, I wonder if one is intended to? It would appear that Mr. Roth never quite decided this point for himself — the slickness of his first person style seems to cover up for an excessive identification. Mr. Howe regards Roth's choice of the first-person as a masterly bit of strategy: "Mr. Roth, to his credit, presents Neil

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with a matter-of-fact detachment which eliminates chances for self-pity." But it seem to me that the presentation of such a character in the first person is begging for pity on Roth's part, because it is an invitation for the reader to side with Neil and accept his point of view (which is exactly what reviewers have done). The book is put together so that the writer is never faced with the possibility of questioning the bleakness of Neil's judgments. Neil's "detached" reactions are simply equated with "reality." The comparison to Gatsby is most instructive: when Fitzgerald wished to make use of a detached observer, he placed Nick Carraway on the periphery of the action. Gatsby himself is warm and attractive—to picture him coldly telling his own story, cleverly dissecting the Buchanans in the process, is unthinkable.

The possibility of *Goodbye, Columbus* conveying any serious meaning is negated by the very techniques by which the story is told. Every time Mr. Roth chooses a detail, it is blatantly comic, as in a cartoon. In fact, *Goodbye, Columbus* is essentially nothing but a string of clever metaphors. Roth's ambiguity is purely a matter of style — wherever he has to supply personal motivation for

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vagueness over the troublesome spot. In place of motivation, the narrative is held together by carefully designated symbols, such as the two refrigerators, the colored boy, the swimming pool, etc. But emotional events are arbitrary and shallowly explored.

Much has been made of the fact that Philip Roth has found a "voice," which means that he has devised a personal and consistent way of arranging his materials so that his narrative flows smoothly from one sentence to the next. This is certainly true, and it is a pleasure to discover a writer whose technical equipment is so completely adequate to the demands placed upon it. Yet one could wish that the demands had been greater, even if that would entail a blurring of the voice. As it stands, the price Roth pays for smoothness is too high: he cheats himself, and cheats his readers of the truth.

Jeremy Larner

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